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MADAME  
SANS - GÊNE

*A ROMANCE*

*by*

EDMOND LEPELLETIER

Founded on the Play by Sardou and  
Moreau

Translated from the French  
and Edited by

J. A. J. DE VILLIERS

NEW YORK: BRENTANO'S

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# MADAME SANS-GÊNE.

## CHAPTER I.

### VAUXHALL.

OUR story opens in the month of July, 1792. Louis the Sixteenth was still nominally king; but his head, though adorned with the Cap of Liberty, was already being clamoured for by the revolutionary mob that paraded the streets of Paris.

The people were only waiting for the arrival of the battalions from Marseilles to give the signal for insurrection, and to make a determined attack upon the monarchy, entrenched, as it were, in the Palace of the Tuileries.

The King of Prussia and the Emperor of Austria were, on their side, preparing for an invasion of France, relying on treason and internal dissension to open a passage for their troops as far as the capital.

The Duke of Brunswick, commander-in-chief of the imperial and royal armies, had published his celebrated manifesto at Coblenz in the following bombastic terms:—

“If the Palace of the Tuileries is invaded or violated, if the slightest insult is offered to the King or Queen of France, or to any member of the Royal Family, the Emperor and the King will wreak terrible and exemplary vengeance upon Paris by completely sacking the city, and meting out to the rebels the punishment they deserve.”

Paris, ever noted for its light-heartedness, replied to this insolent challenge by organizing the revolt of the Tenth of August, and meanwhile abated not a jot of its wonted gaiety. Indeed, there was as much tripping on the light fantastic toe during the Revolution as at any other period, and no sooner had the walls of the Bastille fallen than a notice was stuck up announcing that amidst its ruins there would be “Dancing nightly!”

Singing the *Marseillaise* and treading the *Car-magnole* were two pastimes that went hand in hand.

The immense ballroom known as Vauxhall was, therefore, crowded one evening towards the end of July with a gay throng in which pretty faces and smart uniforms preponderated. The men were mostly National Guards, ready to rush off at the first beat of the drum and commence the great mad galop of the Revolution. Conspicuous among them was a fine young fellow, whose sleeve was adorned with the silver stripes of a sergeant, and who, as he strutted jauntily past the groups of pretty girls, was evidently conscious of attracting their attention. He himself seemed smitten by the robust charms of a comely wench whose honest blue eyes looked some-

that roguishly at the handsome young Guardsman, as he hesitated, in spite of the encouragement of his comrades, to accost her.

"Go on, Lefebvre!" whispered one of the soldiers. Take the place by storm. . . . It's not impregnable, warrant you!"

"If you haven't the pluck, I'll do it myself," said nother.

"Any one can see that she's got her eye on you," said a third, egging him on. "They are going to dance the *fricassée*. . . . Ask her!"

"Shall I, Bernadotte?" replied Lefebvre to the first one who had spoken—a sergeant, like himself. Damme, a soldier of France never turns his back on an enemy nor on a pretty face. I'll make the attack."

Leaving his comrades, the sergeant walked straight up to the girl and, putting his arm round her waist, tried to snatch a kiss as he whispered, "Will you dance the *fricassée* with me, mam'zelle?"

But the lady was quite as quick as the too enterprising gallant. Freeing herself from his embrace in a trice, she gave the young sergeant a sound slap on the cheek, that caused him to prudently retire step or two.

This rebuff, however, by no means cooled his ardour. Putting his hand to his three-cornered hat by way of salute, he said more politely, "Mam'zelle, I hope I have not offended you."

"Oh, there is no offence, *mon ami!* It's a lesson for you, that's all. Another time you will know with

whom you have to deal," replied the girl, whose momentary anger seemed to have completely evaporated. Turning to one of her companions, she whispered, "He's not at all a bad-looking fellow."

Bernadotte, who, in spite of the encouragement he had given his friend, was secretly pleased at the way in which the latter had been received, now went up to him and, taking hold of his arm, said, "Come along; you see you're not wanted here. Perhaps the young lady doesn't know how to dance."

"What's that to do with you?" said the sprightly wench, turning upon him. "I shall dance when and with whom I please; but it wouldn't be with a fellow like you. If your friend now were to ask me nicely, I'd willingly have a spin round with him—and we'd be the best of friends, wouldn't we, sergeant?" she added, holding out her hand to Lefebvre.

"The best of friends, mademoiselle. . . . I beg your pardon once more. What happened just now was not my fault—the fellows dared me to do it; and I only got what I deserved."

"Oh, that's all right," replied the girl. "But tell me; aren't you an Alsatian?—you speak like one."

"Born at Ruffach, near the Rhine!"

"*Parbleu!* Why, we were neighbours. I come from Saint-Amarin."

"What is your name?"

"Catherine Upscher, laundress, living in the Rue Royale."

"My name's Lefebvre, formerly sergeant in the Guards, now in the militia."

“Well, look here, *mon ami*, we’ll talk all this over later. The band is striking up.”

And without more ado she took him by the hand, and was soon whirling off with him in the maze of dancers.

As the couple swept past, a young man with a very pale face and long hair looked up at the girl and exclaimed, “Why, dear me! Catherine has joined the Guards!”

“Do you know her?” asked Bernadotte, who had overheard his remark.

“Yes; she’s my laundress. A brave, virtuous girl—true-hearted, and with a good tongue in her head. For her plain speaking, and her blunt but honest ways, she is known throughout the neighbourhood as Mam’zelle Sans-Gêne.”

The music grew louder, and the rest of the conversation was lost amid the gay tumult of the *fricassée*.

As soon as the dance was over, Sergeant Lefebvre led his partner back to her seat. Peace was now fully restored between them, and as they crossed the hall arm in arm, chatting confidentially, they looked almost like lovers.

Lefebvre proposed having some refreshment to cement their friendship.

“With pleasure,” replied Catherine. “I don’t stand on ceremony. You seem to be an honest fellow, and I see no reason for refusing your kind offer, especially as dancing makes one pretty dry. . . . Let’s sit down.”

“Well, you see, mam’zelle,” said Lefebvre, hesitating

a little, "we soldiers are not in the habit of drinking alone."

"Oh, I see—your friends? Well, ask them to come too. Shall I call them?" And, suiting the action to the word, she jumped upon a bench, and, making a trumpet of her hands, hailed the small group who were watching the young couple from a distance. "Hallo there, you boys! Come here! We shan't eat you."

Four guards and a civilian came over in answer to this invitation, and, the glasses having been filled, all drank to the lady's health.

Catherine and Lefebvre were getting on so well together that they were already using the same glass, and the sergeant even went so far as to venture once more upon stealing a kiss. But Catherine was obdurate.

"None of that, lad," she said. "A joke's a joke, but more than that I don't allow."

"I suppose you didn't expect to find so much virtue in a laundress—eh?" remarked the young man who was not in uniform. "Mademoiselle Sans-Gêne is not to be got at so easily, I can tell you!"

"So easily!" cried Catherine. "Look you here, citizen Fouché—you know me, for I've done your washing for the last three months. Well, have you ever heard anything against me?"

"No—never!"

"I don't mind a little innocent amusement occasionally, such as dancing a *fricassée*, or even having a drink with such jolly good fellows as you seem



to be ; but no man, you understand, has ever passed the threshold of my house, and I'll take good care that none ever do, except one."

"And who will that lucky dog be?" asked Lefebvre, twirling his moustache.

"My husband," replied Catherine, proudly ; and clinking her glass against that of Lefebvre, she added merrily, "Now, my boy, what do you think of that?"

"The idea is not an unattractive one," replied the sergeant. "We'll think it over. . . . Your health, Mam'zelle Sans-Gêne!"

"And yours, citizen. . . . Awaiting your good pleasure and proposal."

"Here comes Fortunatus, the sorcerer," cried Bernadotte. "Who wants to have his fortune told?"

Every ballroom in those days had its wizard, who foretold the future or revealed the past for a few pence.

Catherine felt a great desire to hear her fate ; she had a presentiment that her encounter with the handsome sergeant was to influence her life. Just as she was about to ask Lefebvre to call Fortunatus, the latter was stopped by a group of three young men seated at an adjoining table.

"Let us hear what he tells them," said Catherine, pointing to the little group.

"I know one of them," observed Bernadotte. "His name is Andoche Junot ; he used to be in my battalion."

"The other is an aristocrat," said Lefebvre ; "Pierre de Marmont—he comes from Châtillon"

"And who is the third?" asked Fouché. "That thin fellow, with the olive complexion and the deep-set eyes. I think I've seen him before. But where?"

"He is a discharged artillery officer," said Catherine, reddening a little, "and is waiting for a fresh commission. He used to stay at the Hôtel des Patriotes, near my shop."

"A Corsican, I suppose," remarked Fouché. "They all put up at that hotel. I remember now that he has a very curious name. Wait a moment—Berna . . . Buna, Bina . . . No, that's not it."

"Bonaparte," said Catherine.

"Yes, that's it—Bonaparte. Timoleon, I believe?"

"Napoleon," rejoined Catherine. "He's a clever young man, and everybody likes him."

"He has a devil of a name, this Timoleon . . . this Napoleon Bonaparte! And what a long face he pulls! . . . I shall be surprised if he ever makes his way in the world. People can't remember a name like that," muttered Fouché. "Listen! The old sorcerer is going to tell their fortunes."

"I hope he'll prophesy plenty of good luck for Bonaparte," murmured Catherine; "he really deserves it. He supports his four brothers and sisters, and he's far from rich. I've never had the heart to give him his bill, and you should see what he owes me for washing," she added, with a sigh.

Fortunatus, having gravely scanned the hand of the young man Bernadotte had designated as Junot, said, in a hollow voice, "Your career will be a grand

and glorious one. . . . You will be the friend of a great man—a ducal crown will adorn your brow—you will triumph in the South.”

“Bravo! Considering that I am at the present moment on half-pay, your prophecy is very comforting, my good man. But tell me how I shall die after so much happiness?”

“Mad!” replied the wizard, in a solemn tone.

“The deuce!” cried the other, who had been pointed out as Marmont; “the beginning of your tale is better than the end. And do you think I shall go mad too?”

“No; you will live to be a disgrace to your country and to your race. After a glorious and honourable career, you will abandon your master and turn traitor, while your name will become synonymous with that of Judas.”

“You don’t favour me much in your predictions,” said Marmont, with a forced laugh. “And what fate do you promise our friend here?” he asked, pointing to the young artillery officer, in whom Catherine took such interest.

But Bonaparte, quickly withdrawing his hand which the sorcerer had seized, said roughly, “I have no desire to hear my future; I know it!”

Fortunatus left them, and approached the table at which Catherine was seated with the Guards. Looking fixedly at two of the latter, he said, “Make the best of your youth; your days are counted.”

“Where shall we die, then?” asked one of the two,

who were to be amongst the heroes that fell fighting for liberty on the Tenth of August.

“On the steps of a palace!”

“What grandeur!” cried Bernadotte. “And how about me? Am I also to have a tragic end—and a palace?”

“No; your death will be a peaceful one. You will occupy a throne, and, after having become a traitor to your flag and fought against your former comrades, you will sleep in a tomb far away, near a frozen sea.”

“If you promise my friends everything, there’ll be nothing left for me!” exclaimed Lefebvre.

“You,” said the wizard, “will marry the woman you love; you will command a great army, and your name will always be identified with bravery and loyalty.”

“And I, citizen sorcerer?” asked Catherine, feeling a little afraid for the first time in her life, perhaps.

“You, mademoiselle, you will be the wife of the man you love—and a duchess!”

“Then I shall have to be a duke!” cried Lefebvre, gaily. “A general won’t be high enough for me! Well, wizard, finish your prophecy. Tell me that I shall marry Catherine, and that together we shall be duke and duchess.”

But Fortunatus had already gone off, amid the laughter of the men and the wondering looks of the women.

“Really,” said Fouché, “this magician has not the slightest inventive power. He predicts the highest

destinies for you all, but he tells me nothing. I suppose I shall never be much of a personage, then ?”

“You have already been a parson,” replied Catherine ; “ what more do you want ?”

“What more do I want ? Oh, not much ; I should like to be Minister of Police.”

“Perhaps you may be some day. You’re such a sharp fellow, and always poking your nose into everything, citizen Fouché,” retorted the girl.

“Yes, I may be Minister of Police when you are luckless,” he said, with a strange smile.

## CHAPTER II.

## TAKING THE TUILERIES.

THE night that preceded the Tenth of August was an exceptionally fine one. Until midnight, the moon shed its pale radiance over the city that lay there so apparently calm and peaceful. But in reality Paris had been on the alert for more than a fortnight, ready to rise up in arms at the first alarm. Since the evening when Lefebvre had met Catherine Upscher, the laundress, at the Vauxhall, the capital had become a vast cauldron, seething over with the great revolutionary mass.

Both the Court and the people were preparing for the supreme struggle—for that grand day that marked the victory of the Revolution and the establishment of the Republic.

The movement did not commence before twelve o'clock had struck on that radiant night of the ninth. Emissaries from each of the forty-seven sections that had demanded the abolition of the monarchy went silently through the streets, transmitting from door to door the word of command: "To arms when you

hear the sound of the tocsin and the roll of the drum !”

It was nearly one o'clock before the bell of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, which had given the signal for the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, exactly two hundred and twenty years before, rang out the knell of the monarchy.

To this lugubrious sound was soon added the distant roll of the drums beating the call to arms, and Paris rose up from its sleep and seized its weapons.

The streets re-echoed with the metallic ring of swords and pikes as they clattered over the stones, while here and there was heard the click of a trigger as some careful citizen marksman examined his trusty musket.

The houses round about the Tuileries had all their blinds drawn, and many of the doors were already open. Mademoiselle Sans-Gêne had not been the last to put her nose out. The Rue Royale, in which her shop was situated, was still deserted, but Catherine was patiently waiting and watching. It was not idle curiosity that made her look out so anxiously for the passing of the revolutionary bands. Though she was a good patriot, she was for the moment inspired by another sentiment than that of hatred towards the tyrant.

Since the night of the dance at the Vauxhall, she had seen Sergeant Lefebvre pretty often. On more than one of these occasions the young Guardsman had been very pressing in his attentions, but Catherine

had defended herself against his gallant proposals so energetically, that the sergeant, who was head over heels in love, had finished by making her an offer of marriage. That proposal she had gladly accepted.

"We haven't much to start housekeeping on," she said merrily. "I have my laundry, it is true, but the customers are bad payers in these times."

"I have my stripes," added Lefebvre, "but the pay is often in arrears."

"That's nothing. We are young, we love each other, and we have the future before us. Didn't the wizard promise me the other day that I should be a duchess?"

"And didn't he tell me that I should be a general?"

"He told you first, though, that you would marry the woman you loved."

"So he did. Let us make the beginning of his prophecy come true at once, then."

"But we can't get married just now; there's fighting to be done."

"Well, let us fix some date, Catherine."

"As soon as the tyrant has fallen—will that do?"

"Yes, that'll do for me. Besides, I hate tyrants. Look at this, Catherine."

And turning up his sleeve, Lefebvre held out his right arm, on which had been freshly tattooed two crossed swords, surmounted by a bursting shell, and the inscription, "Death to all tyrants!"

"How is that for patriotism?" he asked proud "as he held it up before his sweetheart's eyes.



"It's splendid," remarked Catherine, emphatically, putting out her hand as if to feel the marks.

"Don't touch it," cried Lefebvre; "it's only just done."

The girl drew her hand back, fearing to spoil such a masterpiece, while Lefebvre added—

"I'm not afraid of it's coming off, you know, but it smarts. In a few days' time I'll show you something better than that."

"What?" asked Catherine, her curiosity aroused.

"My wedding present," replied the sergeant, mysteriously.

Since then Lefebvre had come to pay his sweetheart a hurried visit whenever his duties left him a moment's leisure. Both were beginning to think that the tyrant took plenty of time in falling, and it may therefore be imagined how doubly impatient, both as a patriot and as a bride, Catherine was to see the dawn of the Tenth of August.

The dread notes of the tocsin, as they floated out upon the night air, were ringing the knell of the monarchy for the prisoners in the Tuileries, and a wedding peal for the laundress in the Rue Royale.

Catherine was not left long alone, for several neighbours imitated her example, and appeared half dressed at their doors to hear the news.

"What's the matter, Mam'zelle Sans-Gêne?" one of them called over to her.

"I'm waiting to hear, neighbour," answered Catherine. "Ah, here comes some one who'll tell us all about it," she added, as Lefebvre at that

moment appeared at the corner of the street, fully armed and equipped, and running as fast as his legs could carry him.

Putting down his gun in the doorway, he took the laundress in his arms and gave her a good hug.

"Ah, Catherine, my darling," he cried, quite out of breath, "how glad I am to see you! Things are getting lively; it's sure to come off to-day. Hurrah for the people!"

The neighbours came creeping up one by one, and asked what was going on.

"You must know," said Lefebvre, striking an attitude as though he were about to read a proclamation—"you must know that an attempt has been made in the Tuileries upon the life of our worthy mayor, Pétion."

A murmur of indignation ran through the listeners.

"But what business had he to be in the palace?" asked Catherine.

"Why, he was got there as a hostage. They say that the palace has been turned into an absolute fortress, and that all the doors and windows are barricaded. The Swiss guards are armed to the teeth, and have been reinforced by those assassins known as the Knights of the Dagger—traitors to their country, who have sworn to knife every patriot. If I get one of them into my clutches during the next twenty-four hours, I warrant you I'll give a good account of him," cried Lefebvre, almost fiercely.

"Go on with your news," said Catherine; "there are no Knights of the Dagger here, and I doubt

whether you'll come across any. Tell us what has become of old Pétion."

"He has been ordered to appear at the bar of the Assembly; there, at least, he will be safe. He's had a very narrow escape, though."

"Has there been any fighting yet?"

"No; but Mandat, the commander of the National Guard, has been killed. Look here—I had almost forgotten—here is the wedding present I promised you."

And baring his arm before the gaping neighbours, the sergeant displayed a fresh tattoo-mark representing two hearts in flames.

"You see what there is written underneath," he said. "'True to Catherine till death.'"

At that moment the sound of distant shots broke the silence of the night, and the cannon thundered out a reply.

The street was immediately cleared of idlers.

"Good-bye, Catherine; I must go where duty calls me. Don't be afraid; we shall come back victorious!" cried Lefebvre, joyously. And taking up his gun, he embraced his sweetheart once more, and went off in the direction of the Tuileries.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was not before midday that the roar of the cannon ceased, and that the hoarse shouts of "Victory!" proclaimed the result of the attack upon the Tuileries.

The king, after having inspected the battalion of Guards told off to defend the palace, had returned

to his apartments in a state of despair. Only two out of the numerous companies drawn up had shown any signs of loyalty. All the others had received him with revolutionary cries, and the gunners had even swung round their guns, thus threatening the palace instead of defending it.

Louis the Sixteenth felt that he was lost, and that his power and prestige had vanished. He determined to take refuge in the National Assembly, which at that time held its sittings in a riding-school close to the Tuileries gardens, on the spot where the Hôtel Continental now stands in the Rue de Rivoli. Three hundred National Guards and a like number of his own Swiss Guards escorted him.

The full number of these Swiss Guards was nine hundred and fifty; they were well armed, and perfect in discipline. This little troop, which formed the king's own body-guard, and which had always remained scrupulously faithful to the conditions upon which it was engaged, was fully resolved to sacrifice itself, if necessary, in the performance of its duty. The majority of the men could understand nothing but German, and were to a great degree ignorant of the real situation; deceived by their chiefs, and led on by the Knights of the Dagger, they fully believed, on the morning of the Tenth of August, that they were about to defend the king's person against some bands of brigands who had come to assassinate him. Many of them were, therefore, intensely surprised when they saw the National Guards advancing upon the gates of the palace. The sight of these uniforms

puzzled them. They had expected to see only the scum of the populace, and here they were face to face with a nation in arms.

Westermann, an energetic old officer, was in command of the insurgent troops from Marseilles and Brittany, and had drawn them up in order of battle, while the Swiss Guards held them in check from the windows of the palace. When matters had reached this critical juncture, Westermann addressed the king's defenders in German, dissuading them from firing upon the people, and enticing them to leave their posts. He was so far successful that many of these mercenaries threw their cartridges out of the windows as a sign of surrender.

The patriots, encouraged and reassured by these demonstrations of peace, soon crowded the vestibule of the palace. At the foot of the grand staircase leading to the chapel a barrier had been erected, and on each step, all the way up, were posted two Swiss Guards, with guns cocked and ready to fire. The sight of these tall mountaineers in their imposing uniforms, standing there so mute and threatening, should have inspired fear and respect. A few Parisian loafers, however, in an unlucky moment, thought it would be fine sport to drag down with their pikes and bill-hooks one or two of the nearest Guards that seemed less hostile than the others.

This dangerous joke was going on amid a good deal of boisterous fun, when suddenly a hailstorm of bullets rained down upon the inoffensive crowd. Though it has never been decided on whom the

responsibility of having given the signal for the massacre rests, it is thought that a few noblemen who were standing on the upper staircase, seeing some of the Swiss Guards inclined to fraternize with the mob, had fired in order to stop the fun, and to open a bloody gulf between the populace and the Guard.

The terrible volley had strewn the hall with corpses, and the blood ran in streams along the marble pavement, mingling its fumes with the smoke of the muskets.

No sooner had the signal been given from the hall, than the fusillade spread to all parts of the palace. Among the Swiss Guards were many nobles who had donned the uniform for the nonce, and whose deadly shots were fired from the shelter of the barricaded windows. The courts having been cleared, the Guards made a vigorous sally as far as the Rue St. Honoré, but soon the rebel troops returned in force and with their cannon, and the Swiss having been overwhelmed, the palace was invaded. Nothing could now resist the rush of the triumphant masses. The majority of the king's body-guard were massacred either in the apartments or in the gardens, and some were pursued as far as the Champs Elysées. Many owed their lives to the generosity of their victors, who did their best to protect them against the fury of the populace.

We must now return to Catherine, who, having heard nothing since Lefebvre had left her, had ventured in her curiosity to proceed as far as the

Place du Carrousel. She was anxious to see whether the tyrant was willing to hasten her marriage by decamping with a good grace, and also whether she could catch a glimpse of her sergeant among the combatants. The idea that she might suddenly come upon him black with powder, and fighting like a demon in the front ranks, at the very cannon's mouth, far from inspiring her with dread, only served to make her push on further.

She would have liked to be near him, to be able to hand him the cartridges; even more than that—to hold a gun herself, to load it, and to fire upon the defenders of the tyrant! She felt a warlike soul awakening within her as the smell of the powder was wafted over on the air; and, braving all danger, she advanced nearer and nearer the scene of the fight, seeking Lefebvre and heedless of death.

Then came the terrible stampede occasioned by that deadly volley of the Swiss Guards, and Catherine was borne along by the stream of fugitives down the Rue St. Honoré. As soon as she could free herself from the crowd, she made her way home, fearing that the panic might have spread, and that her house might already be invaded by the mob. Though she had not yet lost all hope in the ultimate victory of the patriots, she was a good deal troubled by the idea that her marriage might be retarded by this temporary reverse.

“They call themselves men!” she cried, stamping with rage. “Fine patriots, indeed, to show the white feather like this! . . . If I had only had a gun,

I would have remained! I'll wager that Lefebvre didn't run!" And with feverish impatience she sat and listened for those shouts of victory that she so ardently longed to hear.

When the cannon commenced to bellow forth once more, she started with joy and cried, "Ah! those are our men. Bravo, my lads!" And again she listened. The firing became heavier and more continuous, and a confused hubbub of cries reached her ears. Soon there was no longer any doubt; the patriots had won the day, and victory was theirs.



## CHAPTER III.

## A KNIGHT OF THE DAGGER.

MIDDAY had just struck when Catherine heard a few shots fired in the immediate neighbourhood of her shop. Opening the front door cautiously, she looked out, and saw a few soldiers flying along, with others in hot pursuit. The last defenders of the palace were being hunted down in the streets. Suddenly there was a sound of hurried steps in the alley that led from the back door of Catherine's shop out into the Rue St. Honoré.

The laundress started, and murmured, "There's some one coming down the court. I hear his steps: who can it be?" Without a moment's hesitation she ran and unbolted the back door, and, opening it, found a man, all pale and bleeding, staggering along the court towards her. He wore a white coat, with knee-breeches and silk stockings; his hand was pressed to his breast to stop the blood that was streaming from his wounds. He did not look like a patriot; if he had fought, it must certainly have been in the ranks of the enemies of the people.

"Who are you? What do you want?" asked Catherine, with severity.

"I am one of the beaten, and I'm wounded. . . . They are pursuing me. . . . Take me in and save me, in Heaven's name, madame! I am the Comte de Neipperg—an Austrian officer."

He could say no more. A pink foam rose to his lips, his face became ghastly pale, and he fell upon the threshold of the door. Catherine uttered a cry of mingled pity and terror, and knelt down beside him.

"Poor fellow!" she murmured. "How they've served him! But he's an aristocrat, and has fired on the people. He's not even a Frenchman; he told me he was an Austrian. . . . Never mind, he's a man all the same." And moved by that instinctive kindness to be found in the heart of every woman—even the roughest—Catherine bent over the wounded man, and, gently removing the linen all glued with blood, she sought to ascertain whether he was dead.

"He still breathes," she cried joyfully. "He may yet be saved."

Running to a tub, she filled a pitcher with water, and then, having securely bolted the door, she returned to the officer. A compress was soon made by tearing up the first piece of linen that came to hand, and Catherine only perceived, when too late, that she had in her hurry destroyed a man's shirt.

"I've done a fine thing now," she said to herself: "I've taken a customer's shirt." Looking at the mark upon it, she muttered, "It belongs to that poor

little artillery captain, Napoleon Bonaparte. The poor fellow hasn't too many of them, and he owes me a pretty big bill. Never mind; I'll get him a new shirt, and I'll take it to him myself, and say I spoilt one of his in the ironing. Poor devil! He doesn't pay much attention to his linen—nor to women either!" she added, with something like a sigh.

While her thoughts were running on the customer whose linen she was turning into bandages, Catherine was delicately placing compresses on the wounds of the Austrian officer—an unexpected guest in such a house as hers.

"He's a foreigner," she murmured, after a moment or two. "What business has he amongst us, with his white coat? He has come to defend the Austrian woman, I suppose—Madame Veto. He doesn't look a bad fellow, though."

Examining him a little more attentively, she added, "He's very young—scarcely twenty. He looks almost like a girl." Then came a more professional observation. "His linen is very fine; it's the best cambric. Ah! I'm afraid he's an *aristo*——" And she sighed, as much as to say, "What a pity!"

Meanwhile the wounded man was beginning to recover consciousness, thanks to the influence of the cold water on his face and the bandages that stopped the flow of blood. He opened his eyes slowly, and looked about him to see where he was. Then, as the recollection of his danger came back to him, he attempted to rise, but immediately sank back

helpless. Turning his eyes towards the laundress with a look of intelligence, and making an effort, he articulated the following words—

“You are Catherine Upscher, from Saint Amarin? Mademoiselle de Laveline told me to come here. She said you were very good—that you would help me to hide. I will explain all by-and-by.”

“Mademoiselle Blanche de Laveline?” cried Catherine, in amazement. “My benefactress—the daughter of the Seigneur de Saint Amarin! It was she who helped to set me up here. Do you know her? There is nothing I wouldn’t do for her. It was a good idea of yours to come here. You are in perfect safety, and they’ll have to kill me before they get at you,”

The wounded man made another effort to speak, but Catherine silenced him with a look.

“Don’t be afraid,” she said, in quite a maternal way. “Nobody shall hurt you. Mademoiselle Blanche need not be uneasy about you; you are being taken care of by a *patriote*.”

She stopped and muttered to herself, “What am I talking about? What do these Austrians know about patriots? They are all subjects, slaves. . . . You are in the house of a friend,” she added, in a louder tone.

An unspeakable joy shone from the young man’s eyes as he understood from Catherine’s words that he was in safety, and putting out his cold, bloodless hand, he tried to bring the girl’s fingers to his lips in his desire to thank her.

“All right; never mind about that! Only let me

take care of you," said Catherine, trying to repress her emotion. Then, knitting her brows, she began to concoct some plan of action. "He would be better on a bed, but I'm not strong enough to carry him. If only Lefebvre were here, he'd do it in a moment. . . . What am I to do? I can't let him stay where he is; he'll die. And he a friend of Mademoiselle Blanche, too—perhaps her *fiancé*. Oh dear! oh dear! Why doesn't Lefebvre come?" she repeated in her embarrassment, casting about for some means of getting the Austrian removed.

"Perhaps it's a good thing, after all, that Lefebvre isn't here," she went on. "Not that I think he would reproach me for saving the life of an aristocrat, especially if he knew that it was a friend of my benefactress. And besides, he has often told me that after the fight is over a Frenchman recognizes no enemies. But he's as jealous as a tiger. It would make him mad to see me handling this young aristocrat; and then, I suppose, he would want me to prove that I didn't know him—and that wouldn't be so easy. Not that I wouldn't be able to give him his answer, but that's neither here nor there; I prefer him not to know that this fellow is under my roof."

Just as she was making an effort to raise the young officer, a knock was heard at the door. Catherine started, and turned as pale as her patient.

"Who can it be?" she asked herself. "The shop is closed, and surely nobody will come to trouble about their washing on such a day."

The clang of arms on the pavement soon told the laundress that her visitors were soldiers, and their words dissipated all doubts as to the nature of their visit.

“He ran down here——”

“He must be hiding somewhere——”

“They are looking for him,” she murmured, regarding the wounded man in impotent pity.

“Let’s break the door open!” cried two or three voices.

“How can I save him?” thought Catherine; and shaking the half-fainting officer, she whispered hurriedly, “Get up—quick! You must try to walk.”

“Let me die!” groaned the Austrian.

“Come, come—no dying here! I’ve got to hand you back alive and well to Mademoiselle de Laveline. Get up—that’s it! Where there’s a will there’s a way.”

The soldiers outside, amidst threats and curses, were already raining heavy blows with the butt ends of their muskets upon the door, when suddenly a voice cried, “Wait a moment, citizens; this door will be opened to me.” And Lefebvre—for it was he—added a little louder, “Don’t be afraid, Catherine. Come and open the door.”

“Wait a moment—I’m coming,” answered the laundress, happy to know her sergeant was safe, but in terror for the life of her patient. “Do you hear?” she said to the latter. “They’re coming in—I must open the door. Come along!”

“Where shall I go?”

“Try to get up this staircase; I’ll hide you in the loft.”

“Oh, I couldn’t get upstairs—it’s impossible,” groaned the young man.

“Well, then, go in there—into my room.”

And Catherine, by dint of pushing and pulling, got the officer into her room, and locked the door upon him. Then, happy in the knowledge that she had done her duty, she ran and opened the door to the soldiers.

The shop was soon filled with a squad of National Guards, followed by a crowd of civilians, women and children.

“You took your time in opening the door, my dear,” said Lefebvre, kissing his sweetheart on both cheeks.

“Well, the noise and the shouts——”

“Yes, I quite understand that you were afraid, but these are all friends and patriots. We have won, Catherine, all along the line. The tyrant is now a prisoner of the people; the fortress of despotism is taken, and the nation is master to-day!”

“Hurrah for the nation!” “Death to traitors!” shouted the crowd that pressed round the door of Catherine’s shop.

“Yes, death to those who fired on the people,” said Lefebvre, in a firm voice. “I will tell you why these soldiers are here, Catherine. A few comrades and myself were in pursuit of an aristocrat who had escaped from the Tuileries—one of those Knights of the Dagger upon whom I have sworn to avenge the

blood of our men. We had discharged our muskets at him, when suddenly he disappeared at the corner of the street. We knew he was wounded, and as we saw drops of blood all up the alley leading to this door, we thought he might have hidden himself here. . . . But we see he is not here, and of course you would have been the first to tell us if he were."

Turning to the soldiers who had accompanied him, he continued, "Comrades, there is nothing to be done here, as you see; the aristocrat has escaped. And I'm sure you won't grudge a conqueror of the Tuileries a few moments alone with his sweetheart."

The Guards took the hint, and left, but the idlers remained blocking up the doorway.

"Come, my friends, don't you understand what I say? What are you waiting for—the Austrian? Well, you'd better go and look for him. With three balls in his chest, he must be lying about somewhere. Go on—look for him; it's not my work. A good hunter never picks up what falls to his gun." And he gave them a gentle push or two to get them off.

"All right, sergeant, there ain't no need ter shove," said one of the loafers; "an' 'e might be 'idden in the other room, arter all."

Lefebvre slammed the door to, and taking Catherine in his arms again, exclaimed, "I thought they were never going! Did you hear what that rascal said? Your room—what an idea! But how you tremble, child! How foolish of you! It's all over now."

Following Catherine's gaze, he saw it fixed on the door of her bedroom, which was generally left open.



Seized with a vague suspicion, he strode across the shop, and before the girl could prevent him he had turned the knob.

"Catherine," he asked, as the door resisted his efforts, "why is this locked?"

There was no answer.

"Give me the key."

"You shan't have it."

"There's some one in this room—a lover, I suppose. I'll have the key."

"I say you shan't."

"Very well—I'll take it."

And plunging his hand into the wide pocket of Catherine's apron, Lefebvre seized the key and entered the bedroom.

Again there was a knock at the shop-door, which Catherine opened.

A squad of National Guards stood at attention, whilst one of their number inquired for the sergeant.

"He is wanted at the section; they talk of making him lieutenant."

At that moment Lefebvre made his reappearance at the door of the bedroom, which he carefully locked, returning the key to Catherine with the remark, "You didn't tell me your room was a hospital, my darling; I suppose that's not a lover?"

"You silly boy! Do you think I should have hidden him there, if he were? But you won't give him up, will you? He is a friend of Mademoiselle Blanche de Laveline, my benefactress."

"A wounded man is sacred, and a true soldier

never fires on the ambulance. . . . Take care of the poor devil, and save him. I am glad to help you pay your debt towards this lady. But don't let any one know it; it might do me harm."

"You are a noble fellow," cried Catherine; and she added in a whisper, "We will get married as soon as you like."

"Sergeant Lefebvre, our comrades are waiting to vote," cried one of the Guards at the door.

"Right 'bout turn—mar-r-rch! I follow you!"

## CHAPTER IV.

## A PROMISE.

As soon as her lover had left, Catherine prepared some broth for her patient, and on his awakening brought him a plateful with a small glass of wine.

“Come along, you must keep up your strength, for you won’t be able to remain in this room very long. Not that I’ll send you away; you are the guest of Mademoiselle Blanche, and she has more to say here than I have. But all kinds of people come to my shop, and even if the customers didn’t get to know you were here, the girls I employ would be certain to find it out, and you might be denounced. Hang it, you know, you fired on the people—and that’s no joke!”

Neipperg answered with some difficulty, “We defended the king.”

“What! Big Veto, as they call him,” said Catherine, shrugging her shoulders. “Bah! He would have been all right in the Assembly; they wouldn’t have taken the trouble to go there for him. He’s a harmless, useless old good-for-nothing, your Big Veto, led

by the nose by his wife. And do you know where she'll lead him? To his death! Oh, it'll come to that. But what on earth has all this to do with you? You told me you were a foreigner."

"I was entrusted with a mission to the queen."

"The Austrian woman," muttered Catherine. "And was it for her sake that you mixed yourself up in all this, and nearly lost your life?"

"I wished to die!" replied the young officer, simply.

"To die! At your age—and for the king and queen? You must have had some other reason, young gentleman," said Catherine, good-humouredly. "You'll pardon my indiscretion, but when young men of twenty want to get killed for the sake of people they don't know, and for a cause about which they don't care a fig—well! there's generally a lady in the case. Come, am I right or not?"

"You have hit it, my kind hostess."

"I thought so, and it isn't very difficult to guess who it is. . . . Oh! I'm not trying to get at your secret—it's nothing to do with me; and Mademoiselle de Laveline is well worth a man's love."

The Comte de Neipperg could no longer refrain from giving vent to his feelings.

"Oh, how beautiful and good she is, my beloved Blanche! . . . If I die, tell her that I spoke her name with my last breath, and that my last thoughts were of her and of——"

Here he suddenly stopped himself, and Catherine, anxious to comfort him, replied gaily—

"You're not going to die. You must live for the

young lady you love, and for the other person you were just about to name—her father, no doubt, the Marquis de Laveline. I saw him two or three times at home in our Alsace. A very fine gentleman, in a splendid coat of blue velvet, all covered with gold."

Noting the young man's evident displeasure at her mention of the old marquis, Catherine muttered to herself, "They don't seem the best of friends—that's a good thing to know. No doubt the old gentleman is opposed to the marriage. Poor young lady! That's why her lover wanted to die."

With a sigh of compassion she smoothed the officer's pillows, and said to him softly, "I'm gossiping too much, and that's not good for you. . . . Go to sleep if you can; it will diminish the fever."

The wounded man shook his head and murmured, "Speak to me of Blanche; that is the best cure for me."

Catherine smiled, and began to tell him how, born in a farm not far from the château of the Lavelines, she had seen Mademoiselle Blanche grow up. The marquis being absent at Court during the greater part of the year, leaving his wife and child at home, Blanche had led a rustic life, scouring the forests, and riding and hunting about the country for miles around. She was very kind to all the peasants, and, being a frequent visitor to the little farm, had taken a great liking to Catherine. One day the marquis decided that his wife and child should come and live with him at Versailles, and Catherine, with three other

girls, had been taken into their service. Then, after a few happy years, Madame de Laveline had died, and Blanche, being obliged to accompany her father to London, whither he had been sent on a diplomatic mission, had established Catherine in business in the Rue Royale.

As the laundress finished her recital of the many benefits she had received from Blanche de Laveline, there was a knock at the shop-door.

"Can Lefebvre be back already?" thought Catherine. "If he is alone it doesn't matter, but if his comrades are with him, I must talk to them and get them away."

Expecting a company of men, she was therefore considerably surprised, on opening her door, to see a young woman rush into the shop in extreme agitation.

"He *is* here, isn't he?" asked this strange visitor. "They told me a wounded man was seen coming this way. Is he still alive?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle Blanche," answered Catherine, recognizing her former young mistress in this terrified woman. "He is here, in my room, talking of nothing but you. Come and see him."

The sight of Blanche had a wonderful effect upon the wounded man. He wanted to jump up from the bed which it had cost him so much difficulty to reach, and it required all the persuasive powers of the two women to keep him there.

"You bad boy!" said Blanche, in a sweet but reproachful voice. "So you wanted to die!"

"Life without you was a burden. Could I find a

better opportunity of quitting it than sword in hand, and by a glorious death?"

"You ungrateful fellow! could you not have lived for me?"

"For you—when you had left me for ever, and were as one dead?"

"This hateful marriage is not yet concluded; some chance may aid us. You ought to have waited."

"You told me yourself that there was nothing to hope for; that you were to be married to-day, the tenth of August; that your father willed it so, and that you could not resist."

"You know very well that all my tears and prayers were useless. The Baron de Lowendaal, to whom my father owes immense sums of money, demanded immediate payment or my hand in marriage."

"I know," replied the officer, bitterly. "But how is it, Blanche, that you are here to-day, the date fixed for the ceremony? Your place should be in church by your husband's side. Why is the happiness of the Baron de Lowendaal and the payment of your father's debts postponed? I suppose the fighting interrupted the ceremony; but now that the firing has ceased, and the tocsin is silent, they can ring the wedding bells. Leave me to die, here or elsewhere—to-day or to-morrow—what matters it?"

"No, no, you must live—for me—for our child!" cried Blanche, bending over Neipperg and folding him in a passionate embrace.

"Our child!" repeated the young officer, sadly. "But what of your marriage?"

"It is not yet concluded; perhaps it never will be."

"What do you mean?" And a feverish anxiety crept over the comte's features as he waited for the girl's reply.

"You remember that when you went away we wished each other an eternal farewell, for you were going to almost certain death. But, as there was still a spark of hope left in my breast, I told you to come to this house if you were obliged to flee from the Tuileries, trusting that I might be able to join you here."

"You still entertained some hopes of that? And yet you had promised to become the wife of this Lowendaal?"

"Yes; but something told me the marriage would be postponed. A few days ago my father declared that it would be impossible to celebrate it on the day originally fixed, and the baron agreed to put it off for three months."

"Three months!"

"Yes; the date is now fixed for the sixth of November. Terrified by the present state of public affairs, and fearful of the progress of the Revolution, Lowendaal left Paris last night before the closing of the barriers. He has decided that this impossible marriage is to take place at his castle near Jemappes, on the Belgian frontier."

"And are you going there?"

"My father, who is also rather afraid of this revolt, has decided to go, and we are to start as soon as



the roads are open; but though I am going, I swear to you I never will be this man's wife."

"What will give you strength to resist at Jemappes, when you yielded to your father's wishes here?"

"Before his departure I wrote a letter to the baron, and bribed his servant to give it him only after they had passed through the barriers."

"Then he knows——?"

"The whole truth. He knows that I love you, and that our child can have no other father but you."

"Oh, my darling—my wife! how I adore you! You are giving me back my life. I almost seem to have strength enough to get up and recommence the fight against the *sans-culottes*."

Neipperg, in his excitement, made such a sudden turn that the compresses became displaced, and a fresh rush of blood poured from his wounds. Catherine, who had discreetly retired to her laundry during the lovers' conversation, came running into the bedroom in answer to the girl's cries for help, and between them they replaced the bandages as well as they could; but the officer had again fainted.

When he returned to consciousness his first words revealed his secret. "Blanche . . . I am going to die. . . . Watch over our child," he murmured.

Catherine was thunderstruck at hearing this revelation; but seeing her young mistress hanging her head in shame, she said hurriedly, "Don't be afraid. What I heard went in at one ear and out at the other. But if ever you should want me, you know

that I am entirely at your service. Come, don't be disheartened; everything will come right in the end. And where is the little darling? Mayn't I see him?"

Blanche de Laveline was lost in thought for a moment or two.

"Listen, my dear Catherine. You can render me a great service, and thus complete the work you have so well commenced in attending to Monsieur de Neipperg."

"Tell me what I must do."

"My boy, who is now three years old, is in the care of a good woman named Hoche, who lives near Versailles."

"Mother Hoche? I know her. Her son Lazare is a great friend of Lefebvre—the sergeant to whom I am engaged to be married. They fought side by side at the taking of the Bastille."

"Well, I want you to go to Mother Hoche, and give her this money and this letter," said Blanche; "and then you will take away the child and bring it me. Am I asking too much of you, Catherine?"

"Asking too much? What a question! You know that, if you asked me to go and take the Tuileries alone, I'd do it—or try to. And where am I to bring the child?"

"To the Château de Lowendaal, near a village called Jemappes. It's in Belgium, just on the frontier. Do you think you can get there?"

"Tell me when you want me to be there—that's all."

"Not later than the sixth of November."

“I shall be there. Lefebvre will get me through. Besides, we shall be married by that time, and who knows but what he may come with me?”

“I shall depend upon you, then, and thank you in advance.”

“You have already done so,” replied Catherine. “And now, if you will permit me, I will run off with this linen to one of my customers, and leave you in charge of the comte for a little while. He’s just awakening, and I dare say you have plenty of things to say to each other before you part.”

With that she gave her young mistress a good hug, and went off repeating to herself, “Château de Lowendaal. Jemappes—the sixth of November.”

## CHAPTER V.

## THE UNPAID BILL.

THE customer upon whom Catherine was about to call was one Napoleon Bonaparte, the young artillery officer in whom we have already seen her evince some interest on the night of her first meeting with Lefebvre at the Vauxhall.

The man who, like Luther, was one day to shake the world, was at that moment in temporary disgrace. He had got himself into some trouble with his superiors by accepting the command of the Corsican Militia, while in reality on sick-leave at his home in Ajaccio. Having returned to Paris, he was impatiently and in some trepidation awaiting the reply to his petition to be reinstated in his former position.

Entirely destitute of means, he was obliged to exercise a rigorous economy, and occupied a wretched room in a second-rate hotel, dining sometimes with some of his less impecunious friends, sometimes not at all.

On the morning of the Tenth of August, Bonaparte had risen at the sound of the tocsin, and had gone

as a simple spectator to see the fun from the windows of a friend's house in the Place du Carrousel. At midday, after what was virtually the overthrow of the monarchy, he had returned to his humble lodging, his mind full of the terrible scenes he had just witnessed, and boiling with indignation at the massacre for which the Knights of the Dagger were responsible.

To distract his thoughts, he had unfolded a large map, and was soon immersed in a deep study of the Mediterranean coast, which was just then menaced by the English fleet, and where a Royalist reaction was imminent. Again and again there rose up before the young officer what seemed but empty dreams of glory and conquest, quickly dissipated by the stern reality of the bare walls around him whenever he chanced to raise his head. He smiled bitterly as he compared his pitiable position, in which there was scarcely any hope of change, with the chimeras that haunted him. No money, no commission. The minister deaf to his prayers, and his former superiors hostile. Not one friend, not one protector! And yet, in spite of all this, once more came surging through his brain those obstinate visions that seemed like Eastern fairy tales, so bright and gorgeous and yet so bloody were they all.

Leaning back in his chair, his hands folded over his massive head, he saw himself mounted on a white charger, surrounded by thousands of brave veterans, entering some captured capital of Europe. Now, flag in hand, he was encouraging his battalions to unheard-

of deeds of valour on bullet-swept redoubts and over virgin fortifications. Strange horsemen, in accoutrements of gold and silver, with flashing scimitars and blood-red turbans, knelt before his tent, and millions of voices proclaimed the glory of his arms and the prowess of his nation. Through the snow and ice of the North, and across the burning plains of the South, sped his countless legions, and kings and princes fought to pay him homage. The various elements of his dream were merging into one grand apotheosis, in which he saw himself, another Alexander, master of the world, when the face of a woman, fair, young, and energetic, came between him and his vision of glory.

“And who are you?” he murmured, scarce knowing whether she was a creature of his brain or real flesh and blood.

A silvery laugh dispelled his illusions. “Why, I’m Catherine. I’ve brought your washing. I thought that you might want it, captain.”

Bonaparte growled, “Washing? Oh, all right; put it on the bed.”

Catherine had been so startled by the officer’s savage air that she was afraid to move, and stood stock-still, holding her basket in her hand.

“What a fool I must look!” she thought to herself. “But I can’t help it; this young man always frightens me.”

She looked at the bed on which Bonaparte had told her to place the linen, changed her basket from one arm to the other, and then, putting her hand in the pocket of her apron, clutched the washing-bill that

she had brought for her long-winded debtor. But further than that she could not get.

Bonaparte had resumed his place before the map spread out on the table, and seemed to have forgotten her presence.

At last she gave a little cough.

Bonaparte looked up and frowned. "What! aren't you gone yet?" he asked, somewhat ungallantly. "What are you waiting for?"

"Well, citizen—I beg your pardon—captain, I mean—I—er—I'm going to be married," said Catherine, bringing the words out with a rush.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Bonaparte, indifferently. "So much the better for you, my good girl. I wish you joy! And you're going to marry some honest fellow, I suppose—a baker or something like that?"

"No, captain," replied Catherine, rather piqued; "a soldier—a sergeant!"

"Ah! I'm glad to hear that," said Bonaparte, a little more gently. "To be a soldier is to be twice a Frenchman. I wish you luck." And he turned his attention once more to the map.

Catherine went on more boldly, "I also came to tell you, captain, that I am afraid I must give up the laundry."

"Indeed! Are you going to retire from business?"

"Things are so bad just now, and I want to follow my husband."

"With the regiment?" asked Bonaparte, in some surprise.

"Why not? They have need of vivandières, and

I see no reason why I shouldn't provide for the wants of my husband's comrades. I hope to have your custom, captain, whenever we chance to meet."

"I shall not forget you. But, for the moment, I am debarred both from serving and from—spending money at canteens," he added, with a sigh.

And he returned to his table, a prey to gloomy reflections, whilst Catherine quickly laid out the linen she had brought. Then, with a curtsy, she bade the captain, "Au revoir."

"Au revoir, my child. I'll see you at your canteen—some day!"

As she went down the stairs, Catherine muttered, "I've got his bill in my pocket, but I hadn't the courage to give it him. Bah! he'll pay me, some day. I trust that lad. I'm not like citizen Fouché; I'm sure he'll make his mark."

On reaching the Rue Royale she found her shop surrounded by a great crowd, in the centre of which was Lefebvre, no longer carrying a gun, but wearing at his side the sword of a lieutenant.

His comrades were giving him quite an ovation, shouting themselves hoarse, and waving their hats.

"My friends," said the new lieutenant, catching sight of Catherine, "allow me to present to you my wife. We marry next week!"

"Long live the *citoyenne*! Long live Madame Sans-Gêne!" shouted the Guards.

Meanwhile the unemployed artillery officer in his bare little room, having finished the study of his map,





## CHAPTER VI.

## A VIVANDIÈRE OF THE "13TH."

MOTHER HOCHÉ was standing at the door of her greengrocer's shop in the Rue de Montreuil at Versailles, serving her customers, and occasionally bestowing watchful glances upon a chubby little urchin who was burying himself in a heap of cabbages and turnips.

"Henriot! I shall come and whip you if you don't leave off putting things in your mouth," cried the good woman from time to time, trying to dissuade the youngster from taking a bite or two of raw turnip. "What an appetite that boy has, to be sure! Can't leave anything alone; but he's a dear little fellow for all that."

Suddenly she stopped in the midst of making up a salad for a customer—a delicate operation, requiring much care—and uttered a cry of amazement.

Before her stood a smart and stalwart young fellow wearing the uniform of an officer in the Grenadiers; he was accompanied by a comrade, on whose arm hung a fresh-looking beauty, evidently decked out in all her Sunday finery.

"Well, Mother Hoche, don't you know me?" cried the soldier, drawing the good old woman towards him, and imprinting two sounding smacks upon her cheeks.

The customers that stood round the shop with gaping mouths, stared alternately at the phaeton that had brought the three young people from Paris, and at the brand-new uniform and the golden tassels of the officer.

"He's a capting," murmured one old woman.

"Don't you know who he is?" said another. "Why, that's little Lazare—Mother Hoche's nephew—'im what she brought up as 'er son. We used to see 'im play with our brats in the square; and now look at 'im—'e's a capting!"

"Yes, mother," said Lazare Hoche to his foster-parent, "I am a captain—appointed only yesterday—and here to-day to celebrate the event with you and my friends. Let me introduce them. François Lefebvre, a comrade of mine and lieutenant in the Guards. He was the first one to teach me how to hold a gun," he added, slapping his old friend on the back.

"And now you are my superior officer!" cried Lefebvre, merrily.

"Never mind! You'll catch me up, and pass me, perhaps. War is a lottery in which you are sure to get a big prize some day—if you live! But let me finish my introduction. . . . This is Catherine, the wife of my friend here; and a good wife too, I'll warrant, though of no long standing. She has

something to say to you, so whilst you are talking and getting dinner ready, Lefebvre and I will go and attend to a little business matter in the town."

"Something to say to me?" inquired Mother Hoche.

"Yes," replied Catherine. "About that little rascal there," pointing to Henriot, who was watching the visitors with great interest from his cabbage-heap.

"Well, well, you can do the talking whilst I clean some turnips and pluck a fowl. That and some omelettes will do, my beauty, won't it?" she asked, turning to Hoche.

"Capital—capital!" cried the latter, as he went off with his friend.

The women being left alone, Catherine explained to Mother Hoche that she had come to fetch the boy, according to the promise she had made his mother.

"And are you going to take him to her?" asked the old woman.

"No, not yet. I shall have to take the child with me to the front."

"To the front?"

"Yes; the 13th Light Infantry have received orders to march on Verdun."

"Well, what's that to do with you?"

"Why, I'm the vivandière of the 13th Regiment—that's all!"

"You—a vivandière!" cried Mother Hoche.

"Yes; here's my commission," replied Catherine, proudly, drawing from the bosom of her dress a large paper, all duly signed and sealed. "I've got to join my corps within a week. There's work to be done at

Verdun. There are Royalists and traitors in the camp, in league with the Duke of Brunswick, and they must be dislodged."

"Dear, dear, dear!" muttered the old woman. "You a vivandière! Ah, but it's a fine life. That's what I should have liked, when I was young—marching along to the roll of the drum, and seeing something of one's country or of somebody else's. And the jolly boys all round one, too—they're so happy when they've got a drop on board—forgetting their troubles and dreaming of becoming a general or a corporal, or anything with a *-ral*! And when there's fighting to be done, you'll not be like other women, sitting in a corner and weeping; but, moving from rank to rank, you'll pour out courage and heroism to the nation's defenders at twopence a glass. Ah! the vivandière's little brandy-keg has often contributed as much to the victory as the powder-barrel. What a life! Really, if I were younger, I think I would ask to be allowed to accompany Lazare. . . . But what will become of the child in the middle of a camp with the bullets whistling round you?"

"As vivandière, I have the right to keep a horse and cart, and we have already bought both out of the sale of my laundry and Lefebvre's savings. The boy will be better cared for in our caravan than a general's son."

At that moment the two men returned, Hoche leaning on Lefebvre's arm, his face tied up in a blood-stained handkerchief.

"Oh, my God—he's wounded!" cried Mother Hoche.

"Where have you been? Have they assassinated you? What have you done to him, Lieutenant Lefebvre?"

Hoche burst out laughing. "Don't accuse Lefebvre, mother! He has been my second in a little affair that's hardly worth mentioning. The wound's nothing—a clean little cut that won't prevent me eating my dinner, as you'll see."

While the captain was bathing the great gash on his forehead that he called a "little cut," Lefebvre explained to Catherine that she was the indirect cause of the duel.

"I?" cried the vivandière, in amazement.

"Yes; the scoundrel he fought was one of those who believed and repeated the story that you had a man hidden in your room on the Tenth of August, and they came to words about it."

"Oh, the monster! Where is he? Let me get at him!"

"He's in the hospital now, with a nice little hole in him that will take six months to close," said Lefebvre; "and when he comes out, perhaps I'll have a go at him."

"No, no, friend Lefebvre," cried Hoche. "We shall have a better use for our sabres by that time. The country is in danger, and requires all our strength. Let us put away all these petty personal insults. This scoundrel had insulted the wife of my friend, and I was obliged to teach him a lesson."

"But what will you do to this wound?" said Mother Hoche, anxiously

"Bah! that's nothing," answered the captain, sitting down to the dinner-table. "One more or less won't be of much consequence. Besides, it's dry already," he added, taking off the bandage and displaying the gash that ever after marked the features of the distinguished general of Sambre-et-Meuse.

## CHAPTER VII.

## TREASON.

“THEY won’t stop here. . . . There, I told you so. Did you hear the saucy postboy crack his whip at us as he passed?”

“Travellers are getting scarce!”

“Scarce! There are none at all. This one will put up at the Golden Lion, I suppose.” And with these words mine host of the White Horse, one of the principal inns of Dammartin, heaved a deep sigh, to which his wife responded with another.

As he truly remarked, travellers by post-chaise had become rare since the great turn in events that had taken place on the twentieth of June.

The carriage that had dashed past the disappointed host and hostess of the White Horse had left Paris on the eve of the Tenth of August. It was probably the last that had passed through the barriers, for as soon as it had been decided late on the ninth to attack the Tuileries on the morrow, an order had been issued to allow no one to leave the city.

Having got wind of these matters through the



medium of his friends, the Baron de Lowendaal had postponed his marriage with Blanche de Laveline, and being a shrewd man, had hastened to make his preparations for departure. He was a farmer-general of taxes, and had no desire to come into contact with the real representatives of the people. On the evening before the Tenth, he hired a post-chaise, and accompanied by Leonard, his factotum, went off, carrying with him all the money he had been able to collect.

Anxious to get clear of Paris and its neighbourhood with the least possible delay, he had given the post-boy orders to push on right through the night, and it was not until the carriage rolled heavily over the stones of Crepy-en-Valois that he put his head out of the window and sniffed the fresh morning air. Finding the horses dead-beat, and absolutely unable to proceed further, he ordered a halt to be made at the Hôtel de la Poste, where a fresh team could be procured.

Since the day when Louis the Sixteenth had been stopped at Varennes in his attempted flight, the arrival of a post-chaise in every village of France was the signal for a gathering of gaping idlers, each of whom was ambitious to arrest a reigning despot. Fortunately for the baron, the local patriots of Crépy were still in bed when his post-chaise made its noisy entry into the good town.

Whilst the traveller sat down before a steaming bowl of chocolate, Leonard, his man, had shut himself up in the stable with a lantern, and was turning over

in his hand the letter which—together with two louis—Mademoiselle de Laveline had confided to his care before his departure. The strict orders she had enjoined upon him not to deliver it to his master till they were well out of Paris had awakened his interest, and, scenting a secret, the knowledge of which might bring him profit, he resolved to see what this important missile contained. By heating the blade of his knife in the flame of the candle, he was enabled to partially remove the wax that sealed the note, and soon his face expressed the greatest surprise as he scanned the lines that revealed Mademoiselle de Laveline's secret.

“Monsieur le Baron,” ran the letter, “in order that you may no longer cherish illusions that later events would cruelly dissipate, it is my duty to make you a painful avowal. You have obtained my father's consent to a marriage in which you probably expect to find happiness and possibly love; but you will understand that there can be no hope of either when you hear that the heart of your bride belongs to another. Besides, I must tell you that I am a mother, and that nothing will ever make me unfaithful to the father of my child.

“I shall accompany the marquis to Jemappes in accordance with his wishes; but I trust that, knowing the whole truth, you will spare me the shame of revealing to him the true cause that renders this marriage impossible. I rely upon your discretion and honour.

“BLANCHE.”

Having read this strange communication, Leonard sat gazing at it with marks of the liveliest satisfaction, his soliloquy betraying the direction of his thoughts.

“Hang me! But there’s enough here to make a fellow’s fortune,” he cried. “I knew there must be something in her obstinate opposition to a marriage with a man in the baron’s position, but I didn’t expect anything in such tangible form as a kid. . . . What a fool the woman is to have written this to the baron! . . . Not that he’ll mind—he’s not so particular about one more or less; but she’s made a big mistake in putting her secret on paper. Evidently in her own handwriting, too,” he added, as he held the letter nearer the lantern. “She’ll never be able to dispute it; but fortunately for her—and for me,” he grinned in an aside—“her secret has fallen into my hands, and perhaps some day Mademoiselle Blanche—especially if she becomes Baroness de Lowendaal—will be glad to pay a high price to have these few lines back.”

With these words he carefully folded up the letter and put it away safely in an inner pocket, fully resolved to aid the marriage projects of his master by keeping from the latter a communication that might one day prove such a little gold-mine to himself.

The baron, having finished his breakfast, was already impatiently asking for his man, and, a fresh set of horses having been put to the carriage, they were soon clattering away noisily over the high-road

to Verdun, where Lowendaal had some business to transact.

On arriving there they found the town in a state of intense excitement owing to the close proximity of the Austrian army, while the contradictory rumours floating about were of the most alarming character. The baron, having made his way to the town-hall, demanded of the mayor repayment of a loan he had advanced to the corporation some time since, but was informed that, the finances of Verdun being at zero, there could be no question of reimbursement just then.

“But,” added the magistrate, with a meaning glance, “there is still a chance left of your being paid, Monsieur le Baron.”

“What chance? Tell me,” asked Lowendaal.

“If we have no money,” replied the mayor, “the Emperor of Austria has. If peace is maintained, and the town is spared the horrors of a siege, I’ll be responsible for your repayment.”

The farmer-general hesitated. A cosmopolitan financier as he was, it mattered little to him whether his money came from the French or the Austrians, and he was, therefore, not held back by any patriotic scruples, nor did he feel any indignation at hearing the mayor thus covertly suggest the surrender of the town to the enemy. His hesitation was born of a doubt whether the Prussians and Austrians, once masters of the town of Verdun, would be able to hold it against an attack of the levies that were said to be already marching to its relief. Having

expressed his fears to the mayor, the latter assured him that the French soldiers would arrive too late.

"Then I am your man!" said the baron.

"Good!" replied the mayor. "Have you come direct from Paris?"

"Post-haste."

"Alone?"

"With my man.

"Can he gossip—and keep a secret at the same time?"

"What has he to gossip about?"

"The news from Paris; the city in the hands of a low mob; the royal authority strong in its reliance upon the approach of the Prussian and Austrian troops, and ready to resume its power and punish the rebels——"

"Is that all?"

"He may add that he has heard from a trustworthy source that eighty thousand English have disembarked at Brest, and are marching on Paris."

"What is your aim in having these reports spread?"

"To justify the decision we shall arrive at to-night."

"Where?"

"In this hall. A meeting of the principal citizens has been called to decide what reply shall be sent to a message received from the Duke of Brunswick."

"And now, what has my man to keep secret?"

"Our projects."

"Well, not knowing them, he can hardly be discursive on that subject."

The two accomplices separated with a laugh, one going to coach Leonard in the rumours to be spread through the little town, the other to obtain fresh recruits to participate in the treasonable business about to be consummated.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE SURRENDER OF VERDUN.

ALL the most influential citizens of Verdun, together with the magnates of the surrounding district, were assembled in solemn conclave in the town-hall. The mayor, Monsieur Gossin, presided over their deliberations, supported by Colonel Bellemond, the military governor of the place.

The Duke of Brunswick had pitched his camp before their very gates. Were they to open them wide to the imperial general as to a liberator, or were they to keep the draw-bridges raised and reply by cannon-shots to the summons to lower them? The fact of such a question being put at all was in itself a disgrace.

"Gentlemen," said the mayor in mournful accents, "our hearts bleed at the bare thought of the disasters that would befall our town if besieged. To resist an enemy ten times stronger than ourselves is madness. Will you receive an envoy from the duke sent to us with a message of peace?"

"We will," cried several voices.

"Then, gentlemen," added the mayor, "I will have the envoy asked in."

The door of the mayor's private room having been flung open, there appeared on the threshold a young man in civil costume, on whom all eyes were immediately fixed. He was very pale, and wore one arm in a sling.

"The Comte de Neipperg, aide-de-camp to General Clerfayt, commander-in-chief of the Austrian army," said the mayor, introducing the Duke of Brunswick's messenger, who was no other than the young officer saved by Catherine on the Tenth of August.

As soon as his wounds were sufficiently healed, thanks to the care of the sympathetic laundress, he had escaped from Paris, and made his way to the Austrian head-quarters. Although still an invalid, he had begged to be allowed to go on active service at once, hoping in the performance of his duty to forget a little of that grief which the uncertainty of the whereabouts of Blanche de Laveline and his child caused him.

Speaking French fluently, he had been chosen by General Clerfayt to lay before the authorities of Verdun the proposals for the capitulation of the town.

The young envoy immediately proceeded to acquaint the assembly with the message entrusted to him. This consisted simply of a summons to the authorities to surrender the town and the citadel within twenty-four hours, on pain of seeing Verdun bombarded, and its inhabitants handed over to the fury of the soldiers after the attack. Both the summons



and the threat were listened to in dead silence. In spite of the fact that many of those present were Royalists, and anxious above all to preserve their land and property, it was a difficult thing for these wealthy citizens to swallow such a haughty and insolent message.

There were some among them who would willingly have joined in an energetic protest, even were it only as a matter of form, and to preserve an outward semblance of honour. But no one opened his mouth. Not one dared to risk the opprobrium of having called down on Verdun the wrath of the Germans.

Neipperg remained as immovable as a statue, though his blood boiled within him as he witnessed the cowardice of men who preferred the shame and the dismemberment of their country to a resistance in which their houses would have been exposed to the fire of the cannon. He could not help comparing the conduct of these Frenchmen with that of their countrymen who had fought so desperately around the Tuileries on the Tenth of August. He had nothing but admiration for the patriots who had wounded him, for a true soldier bears no malice to a brave foe; but the fear that had seized these shopkeepers and traitors disgusted him.

Anxious to get out of their presence, which he felt to be a contamination, he rose and said, "You have heard the communication of my commander-in-chief; what reply am I to take to the Duke of Brunswick?" And with his hand resting on the table, he waited for an answer.

A voice broke the silence. "Don't you think, gentlemen, that while thanking the duke for the sentiments he has expressed in such merciful terms, you would do well to delay your answer—at least until his Highness has done our town the honour of sending her a few bombs?"

It was Lowendaal who had spoken.

Neipperg, on recognizing his rival, was seized with a fit of passion, and would have rushed upon him had he not remembered that he was an ambassador with an important mission to fulfil, and that he was not free just then to avenge his own wrongs. The thought struck him that since Baron de Lowendaal was at Verdun, Blanche de Laveline might possibly be there too. But where was he to find her? How could he see or speak to her? In his despair he hoped that the baron might unwittingly give him some clue to Blanche's whereabouts, and he was therefore obliged to contain himself and wait patiently.

A murmur of disapproval had followed Lowendaal's words. What business had this farmer-general to meddle in their affairs? Had he any houses, workshops, or goods in the town? Would he be a loser by the bombardment? Since, according to the opinion of the governor himself, resistance was useless, why should they allow their fellow-citizens to be massacred and expose their homes to the fire of the artillery?

Such were the objections that were re-echoed from all parts of the hall, and which the mayor summed up as follows—

“Our population is a prudent one, and fears the horrors of a siege. The proposal of the Baron de Lowendaal would, therefore, only be supported by the mob—if it were here. But, as you know, all the rag-tag and bob-tail of the town have gone off in the direction of Thionville, where one of their class—a fellow called Billaud-Varennés—is going to lead them to battle. Let us hope that we will never see them back at Verdun. Gentlemen, have you any wish to imitate them in their anxiety to be shot down by the Austrians?”

“No, no! No bombardment. Let us sign at once!” cried a score of voices.

Several of the good citizens pressed round the mayor, urging him to allow them to append their signatures to the draft of surrender that had been drawn up even before the Austrian envoy's arrival. The compliant magistrate, pen in hand, was about to head the list with his own name, when suddenly the sound of firing was heard in the distance, and the market-place in front of the town-hall was invaded by a mob yelling the *Ça ira*.

The whole assembly rose as one man, and rushed to the windows. At first it was difficult to discern exactly what all the uproar meant, but presently the light from hundreds of torches showed the centre of the square to be filled by a column of volunteers from Mayenne-et-Loire. It was they who were singing the revolutionary couplets of the *Ça ira*, and inciting the whole populace to an heroic defence of the town and the Republic.

"It's these cursed volunteers alone who are making all the row," remarked a citizen. "Our people don't seem to join them."

"Patience!" replied the mayor, with a shrug of his shoulders. "The Duke of Brunswick will soon rid us of their presence, provided that these unchained devils don't call a bombardment down upon us first."

At that moment a red mass came flying through the air, and dropped into one of the houses on the market-place, bearing destruction and terror in its wake.

"There! I thought so!" cried the mayor. "That's all the good these scoundrels will do us. The Prussians are firing on the town with red-hot shot. There's the bombardment you wanted to see, baron. I suppose you're satisfied now!"

But Lowendaal had disappeared, and Neipperg, fancying that he might have gone to rejoin Blanche de Laveline, was most anxious to follow him.

"I have nothing further to do here, gentlemen," he said, taking his departure. "When the cannon speaks, I must be silent."

"Monsieur le Comte," cried the mayor in supplicating tones, "I beg you not to go. There's some misunderstanding. Everything will be arranged."

"I don't see how it can," said Neipperg, with a smile. "Listen! The cannons on your ramparts are thundering forth a reply to our obuses, and your drummers are beating the call to arms. Why, they're

even coming to the town-hall to beat up a few from among yourselves."

Neipperg was right. The drummers were heard on the staircase leading to the council-chamber, and the stone steps re-echoed with the clang of arms.

"How dare they come here?" cried the mayor, white with rage. "Monsieur le commandant," turning to the governor, "order these drummers to be silent, and the men to return to their barracks."

"I'll give the order at once," replied that pusillanimous officer, "and in a quarter of an hour Verdun will be silent."

"In a quarter of an hour Verdun will be in flames, and we shall sing the *Marseillaise* in the blaze of the burning city!" cried a loud voice behind them.

The door had burst open under the pressure from without, and Beaurepaire, accompanied by Lefebvre, and surrounded by the soldiers of the "13th," appeared like a terrible god of war before the eyes of the scared citizens.

The mayor tried to shield himself behind some shred of authority.

"By what right do you come here to disturb the deliberations of the civic council?" he asked in a voice that he vainly tried to steady.

"I am told," replied Beaurepaire, "that you are concocting a vile traitorous plot, and that you speak of surrendering the town. Is this true, citizens? Answer!"

"We are not obliged to communicate to you the resolutions arrived at in this room. Please to

withdraw with your men, and have a stop put to the firing which you ordered without the advice of the Council of Defence."

Beaurepaire reflected for a moment, and then replied respectfully, "Gentlemen, it is true that I did not take the advice of the Council of Defence before firing on the Prussians, who were very near the gates, and seemed waiting for the signal to enter—a signal they evidently expected to come from within. I have had the gates barricaded, and my friend Lefebvre, whom you see here, has left a squad of his men in charge of each approach. The enemy is, therefore, for the moment held in check, but to prevent him from watching too closely what we are about on the ramparts, I have sent a few bullets into a body of Austrians who seemed in too great a hurry to visit us. . . . I was informed of the danger as soon as I arrived with my men, and I confess that for the moment I forgot to take the opinion of the Council of Defence."

"In that you did wrong, sir," said Bellemond, the governor.

"Comrade," replied Beaurepaire to the colonel, "that's my business. When called upon by the representatives of the people, who will be here before long, I shall be ready to answer for my conduct. I respect the commune of Verdun and its municipal officers. I trust they are patriots and ready to do their duty, and well knowing the obedience that the soldiers of the nation owe to the delegates of the people, I will execute their orders in all that concerns

matters within the town and in questions of police. But as far as regards my duty as a defender of my country, and the number of shots to be sent to the Prussians, you will allow me, comrade, to act as I please. You will bear in mind that I am your equal here, and that our common duty is to repel the enemy and save the town."

These energetic words seemed to make a deep impression upon the governor, though he could not help replying, "Nevertheless, you ought to take the opinion of the Council of Defence before commencing operations."

"With the enemy before the gates, and the citizens within hesitating whether to open them or not, the Council of Defence has no alternative but to order the officer commanding the troops to bar the enemy's passage, and to open fire on the advancing columns from the ramparts. That is exactly what I have done, comrade—precisely the same as if I had had time to consult the council over which you preside. Could there possibly have been any other issue? The only reproach that can reasonably be made against me is that I did not open fire soon enough, for until just now there was no ammunition to be found. My men, however, will make up for lost time. Hark! they're at it already."

Some heavy firing in the direction of the Porte Saint Victor followed these words. The citizens in the council-chamber shook in their shoes, and many of them slunk out, anxious concerning the fate of their homes, for the Prussians and Austrians would

undoubtedly reply to this furious cannonade by a hailstorm of shot.

Neipperg, struck by the noble and manly bearing of Beaurepaire, crossed the room and said to him, "Commandant, I must not allow you to remain in ignorance of my identity. I am Comte de Neipperg, aide-de-camp to General Clerfayt."

"You are not in uniform!" said Beaurepaire, suspiciously.

"I did not come as a soldier, but simply as the bearer of an official message to the corporation of Verdun and the Council of Defence."

"A demand for the surrender of the town, I presume?"

"Exactly."

"And what reply have you received?" asked Beaurepaire, casting a searching glance at the councillors around him, many of whom were obliged to turn their heads.

Gossin, the mayor, whispered in the governor's ear, "If Neipperg tells him all, this devil of a Beaurepaire is capable of having us all shot down by his brigands."

"I'm afraid so," replied the governor, sadly.

Neipperg, however, contented himself by saying, "I have not had time to take the opinion of these gentlemen. I understand that you have now undertaken to reply direct to my superiors."

"Then, sir," rejoined Beaurepaire, "your mission is concluded. Will you allow me to escort you as far as the outposts?"



“I am at your orders, commandant.”

Beaurepaire, before quitting the hall, turned once more towards the assembly. “Gentlemen,” he said, “I have promised my men to bury myself with them under the ruins of Verdun rather than surrender the town. I trust that you share my feelings?”

“But what if the whole town wishes to capitulate?” asked the mayor. “Suppose the inhabitants refuse to allow themselves to be bombarded? What would you decide to do? Would you keep up a murderous fire in spite of the wishes of the whole population? Tell us what you would do; we are anxious to hear your reply.”

Beaurepaire reflected for a moment, and then burst forth, “If you force me to surrender the town, I would rather blow out my brains than survive the disgrace. I have sworn to defend Verdun to the death!” Striking the table a terrific blow with his clenched fist, he repeated, “To the death!”

With that he left the council-chamber, followed by Neipperg.

“He would kill himself, would he?” said Lowendaal, who had just returned. “Well, it would be a very good riddance.”

The baron was immediately plied with questions as to what was going on in the town.

“Both sides are peppering each other pretty strongly,” he said, with a sardonic grin. “The volunteers are running to and fro on the ramparts like wild beasts; a good many of them have been hit already. What splendid fellows the ‘13th’ are!

They have a kind of she-devil with them, so I've heard—a vivandière, the wife of one Captain Lefebvre. She rushes about handing the men their ammunition, and picking the lighted fuses out of the Prussian obuses as they fall. I'm told that she has even been seen to snatch the muskets from the hands of the wounded soldiers round her and fire them herself—like a man! Fortunately we have very few soldiers to equal her, otherwise the Austrians would never get in here."

"You have still some hope left, then, baron?" asked the mayor.

"More than ever. As I told you, this bombardment was necessary; the townspeople were not sufficiently impressed. Although my servant has been most assiduous in spreading the reports according to your instructions, the good citizens of Verdun were by no means persuaded, and would have hesitated about agreeing to the capitulation. To-morrow morning they will all come and demand it; your hand will be forced."

"Heaven grant it!" sighed the mayor. "But the Duke of Brunswick's envoy has returned to his headquarters. How can we get at him?"

"Send some one to the Austrian camp with a signed copy of the draft of surrender, and an assurance to the general that to-morrow he will find the gates open."

"But whom can we trust with such a message?"

"I'll go," said Lowendaal.

"You are our saviour!" cried the mayor, almost

embracing the baron in his transport of joy at being helped so quickly out of the difficulty.

Late that night Lowendaal, furnished with the draft of capitulation, left the town, and the next morning Beaurepaire, the French general, was found dead in his bed, having, as he had sworn to do, taken his own life rather than survive the disgrace of surrender. A few hours after his body had been carried amid great pomp to the town-hall, the cowards who had driven him to his death opened the gates of their city to the enemy. The King of Prussia entered Verdun amidst the deafening plaudits of its citizens, and the mayor, at the banquet given in his honour, compared him to Alexander the Great taking possession of Babylon. A breach had been made, the road to Paris lay open, and the armies of Austria and Prussia had only to march on the capital to wreak the exemplary vengeance promised by the Duke of Brunswick.

The garrison of Verdun marched out with all the honours of war, and Lefebvre, now promoted to a captaincy, was ordered to proceed with the 13th Light Infantry to the Army of the North. Burning with rage and shame, he and his men commenced their long weary tramp, swearing to be even with the enemy when there were no traitors between them such as the citizens of Verdun.

## CHAPTER IX.

## JEMAPPES.

WHEN France was in the throes of the Revolution it was Robespierre who said, "To try and carry on a war at such a time is madness," and he added, "But we must fight it out all the same."

The war was indeed madness, because France had neither soldiers, arms, nor money—nothing, in fact, that would either permit the campaign to be carried into the neighbouring countries, or render possible a successful defence against the invader. The generals were all Royalists and traitors, and the men under them scarcely deserved the name of an army, being motley bands of rustics mostly armed with pikes and pitchforks, and devoid of the slightest discipline or military knowledge.

Having in a moment of enthusiasm seized whatever weapons came first to hand, these bands rushed pell-mell to the deliverance of their country, singing the *Marseillaise* and the *Ça ira* as they thundered along the high-roads. The earnestness and the impetuosity of their heroism, however, compensated for their want of discipline, and the trained veteran troops of the enemy could not withstand their fierce onslaughts.

The infantry columns that fought at Jemappes were commanded, it is true, by well-trained officers like Hoche and Lefebvre, and though the rank and file was made up entirely of Republican volunteers, these same columns were for the next twenty years the pillars of the Napoleonic dynasty.

On the fifth of November, 1792, just as the setting sun was tinging the horizon with its blood-red rays, the Republican army made a halt before the redoubts of Jemappes. The heights around the town of Mons are crowned by three villages, and all three were held by the Austrians, who, by the construction of any number of redoubts, palisades, and miniature forts, had made their position almost impregnable. Batteries had been erected at every point of vantage, sharpshooters from the Tyrol lay in ambush in the woods, and the massed cavalry occupied the valleys between the three villages, ready to rush out and mow down the French if they should imprudently venture upon an attack on the hill-forts.

The Duke of Saxe-Teschen had charge of the Austrian troops, the second in command being General Clerfayt, a very able officer, whose wise counsel was, however, frequently rejected by his superior. Clerfayt was rather afraid of the impetus of the French onslaught, and proposed a night attack upon the newly arrived columns so as to disperse them before they were able to form up in order of battle. The well-trying and disciplined Austrian troops would have been certain of victory in a surprise of that kind, but, fortunately for the French,

the duke regarded a night attack as a somewhat inglorious affair, and looked forward to the prestige to be derived from a pitched battle fought in broad daylight.

Dumouriez profited by the inaction of the enemy to draw up his army in a semicircle, the centre of which faced Jemappes. The order was to advance in columns, by battalions, and the cavalry was to bring up the rear. The artillery was placed so as to command the entrances to the valleys separating the three hills, while the hussars and dragoons halted between Cuesmes and Jemappes to bar the route of the Austrian cavalry. The night was already far advanced before all the positions were taken up in readiness for the morrow's battle, but at length the watch-fires were lighted and the men lay down to snatch a few hours' rest.

Midway between the village of Jemappes and the two armies lay the Château de Lowendaal, separated from the French lines by a stream and a small wood, and protected against the fire of the Austrian artillery by the close proximity of its towers to the hillside. Being almost on neutral ground between the two camps, the castle had been chosen as an outpost by both sides. A French squad, sent out to reconnoitre, had met an Austrian patrol under the very walls; after having exchanged a few shots, each little troop had retired to report to head-quarters that the castle was in the hands of the other side, the result being that the dwelling of the Baron de Lowendaal remained in the occupation of its rightful owner only.

The baron had arrived there the day before, and soon after been joined, according to arrangement, the Marquis de Laveline and his daughter Blanche. French troops in any appreciable numbers having not arrived, Lowendaal, more in love than ever, had hesitated to hasten the preparations for his marriage. In vain had the marquis protested that the time and place were ill adapted to the performance of such an important rite, and that the enemy—by whom he meant his own defenders, the French—might be upon them at any moment.

The baron had replied by calling upon him to keep his promise, and by brutally reminding him that military operations did not prevent the settlement of debts.

Thereupon sent for the notary from Jemappes, he ordered the chaplain who dwelt in the castle to be ready to pronounce the nuptial blessing. The marriage was to be celebrated at midnight, and immediately after, the newly wedded couple, accompanied by the marquis, were to depart for Brussels. Here, in the rear of the Austrian army, they would await the result of hostilities.

As soon as she had arrived at the castle, Blanche had shut herself up in her room, refusing to grant the baron even the few minutes' interview for which he had pleaded. Taking up her post at a window that commanded an extensive view of the surrounding country, she sat all the afternoon of the fifth of November anxiously looking out for somebody's coming.

With beating heart and throbbing pulses she

counted the hours of the short wintry day as they passed swiftly by, and when night fell and Catherine Lefebvre had not yet arrived, she knew that some unforeseen obstacle had prevented the brave woman from carrying out the task she had undertaken. What that obstacle might be it was impossible for her to guess, knowing nothing of the new life that her former *protégée*, the laundress, had entered upon. Still less could she know that her child lay peacefully slumbering in the lines of the "13th," drawn up under cover of the dark night but a few thousand yards from the castle.

Catherine, on her side, had no difficulty in learning from the peasants who lived on Lowendaal's estate that the Marquis de Laveline and his daughter had arrived, and immediately determined to seek out the mother and inform her of the safety and whereabouts of her child. Having placed in her belt the two pistols she always wore when there was likely to be any fighting, she left the camp as soon as it was dark and made her way towards the castle. She had said nothing to Lefebvre, who would probably have disapproved of his wife running the risk of such an expedition, the danger of passing between the lines of two armies drawn up ready for action being no mean one.

Catherine, however, trudged on bravely, heedless of the Austrians who were scouring the small stretch of country she had to cover, but none the less anxious to get back in order to escape the scolding she deserved from her husband. As she passed a small clump of



trees that formed the last French outpost, a tall lean figure suddenly stepped out before her.

Snatching one of the pistols out of her belt, she asked in a low voice, fearing to be heard by the sentries posted near her, "Who goes there?" At the same time she took aim, scarcely expecting to receive a reply to her challenge.

"Don't be so silly, M'ame Lefebvre; it's only me—La Violette!" cried a familiar voice.

"Oh! it's you, is it, you fool? You nearly frightened me," said Catherine, recognizing the private who had been told off to help her in her canteen. La Violette was somewhat of a simpleton, and having gained a reputation for being anything but a hero, was the butt for the jokes of the whole battalion.

Catherine had replaced her pistol and was laughing at her momentary fear. "Come here, idiot; you needn't be afraid of me now. What are you doing here, between the lines?"

La Violette timidly advanced a few steps.

"I saw you leave the camp, M'ame Lefebvre, and I thought I'd follow you."

"To play the spy?"

"Oh no! I thought to myself that perhaps there might be danger where you were going."

"Danger! But what's that to do with you? That's something you don't run after, as a rule."

"But I've wanted to meet danger for a long time, M'ame Lefebvre, and I thought that to-night I might stand a very good chance."

“Why to-night?” asked Catherine, surprised at the unusually courageous attitude of La Violette.

“Well, you see,” replied the latter with great hesitation, “if I’m afraid at night nobody will notice it, whereas in the daytime the very fact of people’s eyes being on me would make me tremble. And something tells me that I shall not be frightened with you, M’ame Lefebvre.”

“You don’t mean to say you want to go with me?”

“Oh, don’t refuse to take me—don’t send me back!” begged the poor fellow, adding in earnest tones, “I love you so much, M’ame Lefebvre! I should never have dared to tell you so in the daytime—at the canteen, and before all the men. But here, where it’s dark, I scarcely know myself.”

Catherine had resumed her way whilst La Violette was making his confession, and just as she was about to reply, half impatiently, half ironically, to this ridiculous suitor, two shots rang out in the air.

“Stop!” cried the vivandière to her companion, who had rushed on in front. “Where are you going to? Take care!”

But La Violette had already plunged into the thicket whence the two shots seemed to have come. Fearing some ambush, she stopped to listen. From the small clump of trees the cracking of the dry branches and one or two heavy falls told of a sharp but severe struggle. Then she saw the form of a man stealing away across the plains towards the wood that led to Jemappes.

“He’s making off in the wrong direction; he’ll fall

into the hands of the Austrian outposts," muttered Catherine, thinking that the fugitive must be La Violette.

"What a pity!" she added somewhat regretfully. "He was a good lad, though a great coward. I shall have some difficulty in getting a substitute for him at the canteen."

She was about to continue her route to the castle, the towers of which were already visible, when La Violette suddenly appeared before her, wiping his sabre with a handful of leaves.

"You!" she cried in amazement. "Where do you come from? What have you been doing?"

"I have prevented one of those rascals from reloading his gun," said La Violette, calmly.

"What! have you killed him?"

"I think so. As for the other, it was lucky for him that he had a coward like me to deal with. I might have caught him up, for I'm a splendid runner, but I had this confounded thing on my back, and I couldn't get along."

"What's that?"

"It's a drum; I borrowed it from one of the boys."

"What on earth for?"

"Oh! it's very useful sometimes, and I prefer it to a gun. I should have loved to be a drummer, but it's just my luck—I'm too big. . . . Don't you think we'd better be getting on? The Austrian who cut away will give the alarm, and we shall have any number of white-coats down on us soon. I'm not anxious about myself, but——"

"Why, aren't you afraid?"

"Never at night, as I told you. Come, let's get on!"

"La Violette, you're a brave fellow!"

"Don't make fun of me, M'ame Lefebvre; I know that I'm only a coward, but oh! I love you so!"

"You mustn't speak to me like that—do you hear?"

"Right! I'll shut up. Forward!"

Catherine looked at her canteen-assistant in some surprise. Could this brave fellow who rushed sword in hand upon two Austrians be the lad who was looked upon as the fool of the regiment? At first she had thought of insisting upon his returning to the camp, but seeing him so courageous and spirited in real danger, she feared to wound his feelings.

"La Violette," she said, in a more gentle tone, "I must warn you that I am going to a dangerous—a very dangerous place. Do you persist in following me?"

"I would go through fire with you, M'ame Lefebvre!"

"Well, you'll have to begin by going through water with me, for we shall have to cross this stream to get to the castle."

"Lead on—I follow!"

Having waded through the rivulet called the Wême, they soon came to the high wall that surrounded the grounds of the Château de Lowendaal, and sought out a part that seemed best fitted for scaling. By clambering up on La Violette's back and shoulders, Catherine was over in a trice, and a few moments later the pair were cautiously making their way behind the trees and shrubs towards a brilliantly lighted room on the ground floor.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE INTERRUPTED MARRIAGE.

THE Baron de Lowendaal and the Marquis de Laveline had at last come to terms. The farmer-general had plainly given his creditor to understand that unless Blanche became Madame de Lowendaal that very night, he would foreclose all the mortgages he held on the Laveline estates. More than that, the baron held in his hands the particulars of certain little political jobs in which the marquis had taken part, and the Revolutionary party, if placed in possession of this information, might consider confiscation of property an insufficient penalty and demand the trifling addition of Laveline's head. Having hinted this pretty clearly, Lowendaal left the marquis, who immediately proceeded to his daughter's room to impress upon her the advantages of the proposed marriage, and the dangers to which her refusal would expose him.

On hearing of the latter, Blanche, pale and trembling, could only stammer forth a few incoherent words. She was astonished at the baron's strange persistence. Was he so entirely devoid of both mercy and dignity that, in spite of the shameful

avowal she had made him, he still desired her for his wife? Never doubting that Leonard had handed his master the letter she had entrusted to him, Blanche tried to calm her father's fears. She persuaded herself that the fact of Lowendaal having kept her confession secret proved that he was at heart unwilling to take undue advantage of her father's position, and that, pardoning her fault, he simply wished to influence her through the marquis. Perhaps he still hoped to efface from her heart the memory of another, and it was, therefore, her duty to show him that his efforts were useless. As a result of her reasoning, she repeated more firmly than ever to her father that she would never be the baron's wife.

"Then I shall drag you to the altar—and this very night!" cried the marquis, at last thoroughly roused and exasperated by what he considered the unwarranted obstinacy of his daughter. Leaving the latter, he hurried back to the baron to tell him to hasten the preparations for the marriage.

The more Blanche reflected upon her position, the more determined she grew to resist to the utmost the union that was being forced upon her. To do so successfully, however, she felt that the best support she could have was the presence of her child. The sight of this living witness of her love for another would convince the marquis, and force Lowendaal to relinquish his suit. It was, therefore, with ever increasing anxiety that she wondered what could have hindered Catherine Lefebvre from keeping her promise.

Night had now fallen, and obscured the view from her window. With deep concern she heard from the servants of the arrival of the French troops, and feared that the columns, stretched like an immense net along the French border, would effectually prevent a woman from making her way through, should Catherine at the last moment have set out for Jemappes, after all.

At length, when all hope had fled, and terror and despair were beginning to seize upon her, the idea of flight entered her head. The night was black, and crowds of poor people were hurrying along the roads, fleeing to the nearest Belgian towns to get out of range of the two armies. In the midst of all this bustle she would surely pass unnoticed, or at least unrecognized, and from the next town she could make her way by *diligence* to Paris to learn from Catherine what had become of her child.

Putting all her jewellery and the little store of gold she possessed into a small hand-bag, she threw a long travelling cloak over her shoulders, and took a smaller one to serve if necessary against the inclemency of the weather. She left the lamp in her room well alight, and opening the door with great precaution, stole down the staircase on tiptoe, holding her breath and stopping on each step to listen if all were quiet. At the bottom of the stairs was a door that led into the kitchen garden. She drew back the rusty bolt as quietly as possible, and found herself in the open air.

The night was a fine one, and not so dark as it had appeared to her from her room. She must, therefore, be careful in crossing the garden not to allow herself

to be seen by the inmates of the castle. Creeping round some bushes in order to avoid the light that was streaming from the windows of the servants' hall, she almost stumbled against two strange forms. One was that of a tall thin man, the other that of a woman wearing a short skirt and a small cocked hat.

Paralyzed with fear, she could neither move nor speak, and the woman, taking advantage of her momentary terror, whispered hurriedly into her ear, "Don't utter a word; we are friends!"

"But your voice! Who are you?" murmured Blanche.

"Don't speak so loud! Tell us where we can find Mademoiselle de Laveline."

"Ah! my God, is it you, Catherine?" cried Blanche, recognizing the voice of her former *protégée*, who soon reassured her by saying that she had come, escorted by a good friend—pointing to La Violette—to receive further instructions concerning the child. In answer to the young woman's look of wonder at her strange attire, she went on to explain that she was a *vivandière* in her husband's regiment, and that little Henriot was well guarded amid the watch-fires of the "13th."

Blanche was naturally anxious to go to the camp at once, and informed Catherine, who was attempting to dissuade her from what seemed to be a rash act, of the attempt that was being made to force her into a hateful union.

"But it is madness to go into the camp to-night," said Catherine. "It's all very well for me—I'm used



to these things—but with so many skirmishers about, one carries one's life in one's hand."

La Violette, too, did his best to persuade Blanche to stay at the castle, and it was only by reluctantly telling them that her father was about to drag her to the altar that very night, and that the priest and the notary were in readiness, that the unhappy creature got the devoted couple to realize the danger that threatened her.

They stood there utterly dumfounded, and unable to hit upon any place of action.

"If only Lefebvre were here," muttered Catherine, "he would give us some idea what to do!"

"Let me go back with you," pleaded Blanche.

"But the danger—the bullets—the sentries?"

"I fear nothing. What mother does, when she is anxious to reach her child?"

Catherine was just about to yield to these entreaties, when voices were heard approaching from one of the entrances of the castle. By the light of the torches borne aloft by several servants, Blanche, crouching behind the bushes with Catherine and La Violette, recognized Baron de Lowendaal.

In passing them, he turned to one of the men and said, "Go and tell Mademoiselle de Laveline that the ceremony will be performed a little earlier than the time originally fixed, and that the marquis and I are waiting for her at the chapel."

"Great Heavens!" murmured Blanche, when the baron had moved on; "I am lost—they will discover my flight."

“We must gain time,” said Catherine. “I see only one way, and that is a very risky one.”

“What is it? Speak! I am ready to do anything rather than submit to the wishes of this man. I am determined not to go to the chapel.”

“Suppose some one went in your place; that would put them off the scent for a quarter of an hour at least.”

“A quarter of an hour’s delay would save me,” said Blanche. “In that time I could get out of the park and hide myself in the country. Who knows? I might even be able to reach the French outposts. The idea is an excellent one, but who would dare to take my place?”

“I will,” replied Catherine. “Come along, there’s not a moment to be lost. Give me your cloak. Make haste; here’s the baron coming back.”

Lowendaal, having visited the chapel to satisfy himself that all was ready for the ceremony, was returning to fetch the Marquis de Laveline, and to give his orders in the stables concerning the departure for Brussels. The close quarters of the two armies and the imminence of a battle had made him hasten by a few hours the time originally fixed for the ceremony.

Catherine wrapped herself up in Blanche de Laveline’s long cloak, while the young mother, putting on the smaller one she had with her, started off under the guidance of La Violette, who was as proud as a peacock at being entrusted with the care of a real live lady. As soon as they were out of sight Catherine

walked boldly to the threshold of the servant's hall, and said briefly, "Tell Monsieur le Baron that Mademoiselle de Laveline awaits him in the chapel."

She walked away with as dignified a step as she could command, trying not to trip herself up in the ample folds of the cloak, which was a trifle too long for her. On entering the chapel she found no one there but an old priest on his knees, who paid her not the slightest attention. The death-like silence of the place, and the funereal light shed by the few candles burning here and there, sent a shiver through her frame, and the few moments she was kept waiting seemed to her an eternity. At last the door was swung back noisily, and the sound of many footsteps re-echoed through the sacred edifice. In order to keep up her part as long as possible, Catherine had drawn the hood of her cloak over her head and knelt down as if buried in prayer.

The priest had risen slowly and approached the altar, commencing the recital of his ritual in a low voice. Meanwhile Baron de Lowendaal walked across to the kneeling woman he believed to be his bride, and, saluting her with a stately bow, murmured, "Though I had hoped, mademoiselle, to have the honour and pleasure of accompanying you hither myself, I cannot sufficiently express the delight it gives me to see you here at all. Permit me to take my place at your side."

Catherine remained silent and immovable. It was now the turn of the Marquis de Laveline to congratulate the pretended bride upon having at length

come to her senses and fallen in with his wishes. "But do take off this travelling cloak, Blanche," he added, somewhat impatiently; "you can't be married like this. Show your face and smile a little, if it be only out of compliment to our guests, General Clerfayt's officers, who have been kind enough to come and assist as witnesses."

Before Catherine could prevent, or was even aware of the nobleman's intentions, he had pulled back the hood from her head and shoulders, and stood gazing at her in dumb astonishment.

"This isn't my daughter!" he cried at last.

"Who are you?" asked the baron, not a whit less amazed.

The priest at that moment turned towards the assembly with outstretched arms and mumbled, "*Benedicat vos, omnipotens Deus! Dominus vobiscum!*"

And he waited for the customary reply, "*Et cum spiritu tuo!*"

But in the general confusion no one heeded his liturgy. The Austrians had drawn nearer to the principal actors in this almost comical scene, and as Catherine, seeing that further concealment was useless, had thrown aside her cloak and stood there in her short tricolour skirt, one of the officers cried in mock terror, "A French vivandière, as I live!"

"Yes, that's what I am," cried Madame Sans-Gêne; "a vivandière of the '13th.' Do I frighten you, my lads?" she asked ironically; for, in truth, the Austrians, as well as the discomfited bridegroom and the marquis,

were casting anxious glances round the church, fearing they had fallen into some ambuscade.

But as the representative of the "13th" seemed to be unsupported by her comrades, one of the Austrians approached, and laying his hand on Catherine's shoulder, said gravely, "You are my prisoner, madam!"

"Get out; I don't fight! Besides, I'm here on a visit."

"This is no joking matter. You made your way into this castle of which I have taken possession in the name of the Emperor of Austria. You are French, and on Austrian territory; I must therefore keep you."

"Do you make war on women?"

"You are a vivandière."

"A vivandière is not a soldier."

"I do not look upon you as a soldier, but as a spy," replied the officer; and turning to one of his subalterns, he ordered him to go and bring up a few men into whose keeping Catherine was to be given. At that moment Baron de Lowendaal, having hurried up to Blanche de Laveline's room; came running back in a state of great trepidation.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "this woman is an accomplice in the flight of Mademoiselle de Laveline, my bride. Where is she?" he demanded, turning furiously upon Catherine, who simply laughed at him.

"If you wish to find your bride, you must leave these Austrian gentlemen, and look for her in the French camp. That's where she is waiting for you!"

“What the deuce is she doing amongst these French beggars? Is she in love with Dumouriez?”

“She has gone to join her child,” said Catherine, calmly.

“Her child!” cried both the baron and the marquis. “You are mad—woman!”

Lowendaal’s man, Leonard, who was present at this scene, was terribly concerned at the disclosure of what he had been at such pains to conceal. Blanche gone, and the existence of the child known to the baron, the foundation upon which he had hoped to build up his fortune crumbled away, and he was at his wits’ end to find a substitute for the powerful weapon that the knowledge of Blanche’s secret had placed in his hands. He was a sharp and unscrupulous man, was Master Leonard, and nothing but the fear of the gallows would hinder him from carrying out a plan of action when once he had formed it.

“I’ll be off to the French camp too,” he muttered. “There may be some chance left of having a finger in this pie. We’ll see, Madame la Baronne!”

Slipping out behind the Austrian soldiers, he reached the door of the chapel, and made off across the country.

## CHAPTER XI.

## AN UNEXPECTED BRIDEGROOM.

MEANWHILE the officer who had arrested Catherine was growing impatient. "We have no time to stop here, Monsieur le Baron; have you any questions to ask our prisoner?"

"No! Take her away! Shoot her—do what you like!" cried the baron, furiously. "Or ask her," he added, in comical despair, "what has become of Mademoiselle de Laveline, and what she means by this child."

"We'll lock her up in one of the rooms of the castle," replied the officer. "Imprisonment will tame her, and to-morrow she'll answer us."

"To-morrow," cried Catherine, "the soldiers of the Republic will be here, and we shall all be blown to atoms."

"Take this woman away," said the officer, turning to the four privates who had come in obedience to his commands. "If she offers resistance, bind her."

The men put down their guns and advanced to execute the order.

"The first who touches me is a dead man!" cried

Catherine, drawing her two pistols from her belt and levelling them at the terrified soldiers.

"Are you afraid of a woman?" roared the officer, seeing his men hesitate.

The latter, goaded on by their superior, were about to rush upon Catherine, when outside the chapel walls was heard the roll of a drum beating the charge.

"The French! the French!" yelled the baron, while all present yielded to a sudden and irresistible panic. The soldiers, leaving their guns, fled in disorder, whilst their officers rushed out to regain the Austrian lines, persuaded that a French column was upon them. The baron and the marquis, too, fled to the castle, so that Catherine remained alone in the deserted chapel.

Meanwhile the roll of the drum became louder and louder, and at last the long lean form of La Violette appeared on the threshold, much to Catherine's delight.

"You here!" she cried. "Where is the regiment?"

"Where should it be? In the camp, of course!" replied the amateur drummer, giving his arms a rest. "It seems I came just in time, eh? I think I should feel more easy if these were closed, though," he added, swinging forward the great doors and dropping the bar across them.

He explained to Catherine that on their way to the camp Blanche and he had been overtaken by a French patrol commanded by Lefebvre, and that, having confided Mademoiselle de Laveline to the care of two or three of the men, he had returned as quickly



as possible to the castle, fearing for the brave vivandière of the "13th." Seeing lights in the chapel on his arrival, he had looked in through a window, and taking in the dangerous position of his captain's wife, the idea had occurred to him of using his drum to scare the "white-coats."

"Ah! M'ame Lefebvre," he added, as he finished his story, "what a fine drummer I should make, if I were not so tall!"

"And where did you leave my husband?" asked Catherine.

"Two hundred yards from here, ready to advance when I give the signal."

"What signal?"

"A shot; and since we have had these placed at our disposal," pointing to the guns left by the Austrians, "I think we'd better use one at once. Listen!"

The tramp of men and horses outside the chapel, and several orders given in German, showed that the Austrians had returned in force.

"Don't fire!" cried Catherine, as La Violette took up one of the loaded muskets. "The Austrians are too many for us. Lefebvre and his men would be overpowered. We two will be able to escape somehow or other."

A shower of blows was rained upon the chapel-door, and the summons to open it was obeyed by La Violette, acting upon Catherine's instructions. As the mass of soldiers invaded the building, their helmets gleaming in the dim light, and the clang of their

swords and guns making the old oaken rafters ring again, the vivandière and her brave companion retired as far as the altar, near which, in a corner, they perceived the priest, still on his knees, and mumbling his prayers.

The officer who had already evinced such a desire to arrest Catherine once more advanced, this time sure of having his revenge. Turning to one who seemed to be his superior, he said, "We shall have to shoot those two, colonel. They are spies, and our orders are explicit on that point."

"Ask them their names, and what they were doing here," said the colonel. "Then we shall see."

Catherine, being an Alsatian, had understood these words, and said in a firm tone, "I demand that we be treated as prisoners of war."

"But the battle has not yet commenced," replied the officer.

"We commenced it. I was the advance-guard, and this is the first column," said Catherine, pointing to La Violette. "You have no right to shoot us, since we surrender. Should you commit such a cowardly crime, beware of the vengeance of the '13th'! They'll soon be here, and my husband will make you pay for it, as sure as my name is Catherine Lefebvre."

The officer who had been addressed as colonel took a few steps forward, and tried to make out Catherine's features by the dimly burning lamp that hung over the altar.

"Are you related in any way, madame, to one

Lefebvre, who used to be in the Guards at Paris, and who married a laundress called La Sans-Gêne ?”

“I am La Sans-Gêne, the laundress, and Captain Lefebvre is my husband.”

“Then don't you know me? Have you forgotten the Tenth of August?”

“What!” cried Catherine. “Are you the wounded officer?”

“Yes; the Comte de Neipperg, who owes you an eternal debt of gratitude for having saved his life!”

“I am glad to see that you have such a good memory, colonel. What I did for you on the Tenth of August was prompted by bare humanity. You were hunted down, disarmed and wounded. I saved you then without taking any account of the flag under which you served. To-day I find you wearing the uniform of the enemy, and commanding the invaders of my country. I have no wish to recall the past. My husband, my friends, and my comrades in the regiment might reproach me with having saved the life of an Austrian aristocrat, of an officer who orders his prisoners to be shot down. Monsieur le Comte, I have no wish to be reminded that on the Tenth of August I saved the life of an enemy of France!”

Catherine's words seemed to make a deep impression upon the officer. He answered in earnest tones, “Do not reproach me with serving my country as you serve yours. It seems that destiny has willed this meeting in order that I, a colonel of the imperial army, may repay to a prisoner of war the debt

contracted by the poor fugitive in the laundry of the Rue Royale. Catherine Lefebvre, you are free!"

"Thank you," replied the vivandière. "But how about La Violette?" pointing to her companion.

"This man is a soldier who made his way in here by a ruse. I can only treat him as a spy."

"Then you must shoot me with him!" cried Catherine. "It shall never be said that the wife of Captain Lefebvre left a poor fellow to his doom after having dragged him into an Austrian ambush."

"But what were you doing here?"

Catherine looked at the listening circle of officers and held her peace. But La Violette, who could not understand her reticence, and who was by no means anxious to lose his life, blurted out—

"It was on no military business, I swear. Only about some dam kid!"

"A child!" cried Neipperg. "What child?"

"Yours, Monsieur le Comte," replied Catherine. "I had promised its mother to bring her son here, to Jemappes."

"And you ran this risk! Where is my child?"

"Quite safe in the French camp, with its mother."

"Then is Blanche no longer here?"

"She fled at the last moment, and I took her place. Her father was on the point of dragging her to the altar to marry the baron."

"Then but for you——"

"And La Violette!"

"Come, come; I see that I shall have to let you take your comrade with you. I will order two men

to accompany you as far as your lines. Lose no time in reaching the camp; and believe me, my dear Madame Lefebvre, that I still consider myself greatly your debtor."

"Bah! we are quits, Monsieur le Comte," cried Catherine, giving La Violette a push; and the two passed proudly out between the lines of Austrians, the vivandière with her arms akimbo, her little hat with the tricolour cockade jauntily cocked on one side, and a defiant smile on her lips.

As soon as they had disappeared, Neipperg tried to obtain from the servants of the château a corroboration of Catherine's tale, though he was far from doubting her words. He was told that Lowendaal and the marquis had left in great haste for Brussels, and without Mademoiselle de Laveline. Upon hearing this he gave a sigh of relief, and commenced to ponder upon the practicability of getting at Blanche and his child. By the morning the whole line of hills from Jemappes to Mons would be ablaze with the fire of the cannon, and any attempt to get across the country would be impossible. There was not the slightest doubt that the disciplined veterans of the Austrian army would gain an immense victory over the hordes of tailors and shoemakers that formed the Republican battalions, and the Duke of Saxe had already despatched a messenger to Vienna announcing the defeat of the *sans-culottes*. In the inevitable rout of the French, what would become of Blanche?

As all the horrors of an irregular retreat presented

themselves to Neipperg's mind, his heart became paralyzed with fear, and he cast about in vain to find some means of saving his loved ones. Seated in the drawing-room of the château, which had been transformed for the nonce into a kind of headquarters, he was dictating to the officers the orders issued by General Clerfayt for the morrow's battle, when news was brought to him that a strange-looking woman had been arrested by one of the sentries posted in the park while attempting to enter the castle. She had stated that she was the daughter of the Marquis de Laveline, then staying with Baron de Lowendaal.

Neipperg was thunderstruck. If it was Blanche, how could she possibly have made her way back at that time of night through the masses of troops that now occupied the plain? And what was the meaning of this sudden return, when Catherine had assured him that Blanche was in safety in the French camp?

By his orders the woman was immediately brought before him. It was indeed Blanche de Laveline, her hair streaming about her shoulders, her clothes torn to shreds by the brushwood and bushes. Folded in her lover's arms, she poured forth her story. On arriving at the camp, she had, in obedience to Catherine's directions, made her way to the canteen of the 13th Regiment, but, instead of her child, had found an empty cradle. Broken with grief and despair, she had sunk helpless and half fainting to the ground. While in that state she heard one of

the soldiers who had come running to her assistance inform his comrades that he had seen a civilian with a child in his arms setting out from the camp towards Maubeuge. This news had had an electrical effect upon her. The description given by the soldier in answer to her eager inquiries had left no doubt in her mind that the child-stealer was no other than Leonard, Baron de Lowendaal's man. Heedless of the advice of the soldiers to remain in safety in the camp, she had retraced the whole way back to the castle, scrambling through the hedges and muddy ditches, and making straight for the goal where she hoped to find her child.

Her joy at meeting Neipperg was dashed by the grief of hearing that her father and Lowendaal had started for Brussels, and although no one at the castle had seen or heard anything of Leonard, neither Neipperg nor Blanche had the slightest hesitation in believing that the thief had had orders to join his master on the road.

"We shall overtake them at Brussels to-morrow, my love," said the comte.

"But why not start to-night?" asked Blanche, impatiently. "We should get there by the morning."

"To-morrow," replied Neipperg, with a smile, "I must fight. As soon as we have routed the French, I shall return and pursue the wretches who have stolen our child. I must do my duty as a soldier before I obey the dictates of my heart. . . . But what is to become of you till after the fight—a woman alone amongst so many men? I cannot be

always with you, and even my presence might be powerless to keep off petty annoyances and covert insults. Having no rights over you, how can I demand protection for you from my superiors, or respect from my comrades or men? Do you understand me, Blanche?"

Mademoiselle de Laveline hung her head in silence.

"If we overtake your father and the baron after the battle, they will now be able to influence you through the child they have stolen; and what right shall I have to gainsay them? . . . Blanche, there is only one way out of the difficulty."

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Let us be made man and wife at once. Everything is ready here for your marriage. The priest is still in the chapel, and the notary is asleep upstairs on his bundle of papers. We have only to wake him and make him alter one name in the contract, while the priest gives us his blessing. Come, my love—come and make me the happiest of men."

One hour afterwards, just as the first shots of a furious cannonade burst from the circle of hills around them, the Count and Countess de Neipperg descended the steps of the chapel amid the vociferous cheers of the Austrian soldiers, and the respectful congratulations of the bridegroom's fellow-officers.



## CHAPTER XII.

## AFTER THE BATTLE.

A MAJESTIC and never-to-be-forgotten spectacle was witnessed on the sixth of November, 1792, by the crowds of Belgian peasants who lined the hill-tops around Jemappes, anxiously awaiting the result of the struggle between the Austrians and the *sans-culottes*. As the pale-grey dawn came creeping up from the east, the dark masses of imperial troops stationed near the summits were the first to attract attention, the positions they had taken up being both formidable and extensive. On the slopes of the three hills a triple range of well-fortified redoubts had been constructed in the form of a huge amphitheatre, the pieces of artillery numbering fully one hundred.

The incontestable superiority of a veteran army, well provided with ammunition, commanded by such experienced officers as Clerfayt and Beaulieu, and supported by batteries that could sweep both the slopes and the plain, made the imperial generals almost certain of victory. The Austrians, too, had enjoyed a good night's rest and a full meal when the

first shots opened the battle at break of day, while the French, moving about all night in a damp plain, had had no time to prepare any food at all. They had been told that they would find their breakfast at Mons, after the victory, and so with light hearts and empty stomachs the brave volunteers trudged on, hoping to get their meal by midday.

As the troops moved forward at the first sound of the cannon, the bands of each brigade attacked the stirring strains of the *Marseillaise* with enthusiasm, the trumpet-notes ringing out far above the crash of the shells, while fifty thousand voices hurled forth the defiant and martial hymn of the Revolution.

It was not an army advancing to an attack in line, but an entire nation rushing onward to defend its soil and its liberty. The old tactics were abandoned, and the tide of men swept on with uncontrollable and irresistible impetus, carrying all before it. The bands of volunteers, formed indiscriminately of old guardsmen, citizens, and workmen, threw themselves upon the Austrian artillery, and, braining the gunners with the butt ends of their muskets, broke into the infantry squares and routed the cavalry drawn up ready to charge. The old imperial battalions, their ranks filled with veterans, were decimated and dispersed by the hungry heroes of the Republic, many of whom, still wearing the smock of the peasant and the blouse of the artisan, could scarcely load a gun.

It was, however, to the children of Paris that fell the principal honours of the day. Entrusted with

the attack of Jemappes on the right, the Parisian battalions were confronted with three well-fortified redoubts, and might well hesitate a moment or two on obtaining their first sight of the imposing array of the Austrian army. As they wavered for a second, the imperial dragoons came charging down upon them in a solid mass. Desperate in the face of death, the volunteers stood firm, and, waiting till the cavalry was well within range, poured a deadly volley into it and then rushed forward, dispersing the horsemen at the point of the bayonet. The French hussars completed the rout of the Austrian cavalry by pursuing the fugitives as far as Mons, whilst the Parisians, nobly supported by the regiments of the line, soon drove the enemy from their last entrenchments. This decisive victory not only preserved France from invasion, and delivered Belgium, but shed over the new-born Republic a halo of glory by the crushing blow it dealt the veteran legions of Germany.

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By the time that the conquerors sat down to appease their hunger it was nearly nightfall, and breakfast and dinner were rolled into one substantial meal. Toasts were drunk to the nation, to Dumouriez, the commander-in-chief, to the National Convention, to the liberated Belgians, and even to humanity.

As different stories of personal adventures during the battle went round, one of the soldiers of the "13th" remarked, "You'll never guess what we found

in the castle yonder—the one that was used as the Austrian head-quarters. A child !”

“ Why, citoyenne Lefebvre, our vivandière, was inquiring about a child a while ago. Tell us what it was like.”

“ I don't know ; I didn't stop to look at it long.”

“ Do you mean to say that you left it there, exposed to the shot and shell ? That's not like a French soldier !”

“ But listen, sergeant,” replied the man. “ A few comrades and myself had orders to search the castle, which seemed deserted. We advanced very cautiously, fearing some ambuscade, for the dead silence was by no means reassuring.”

“ That was very wise,” observed the sergeant. “ Go on.”

“ On descending to the vaults, I see a shadow stealing along behind the pillars. I take aim and fire, but my shot is wasted. As we proceed further we hear a child crying, and by breaking open a door we come upon a little boy who had been locked in, and who repeated, “ Leonard—run away !”

Meanwhile Catherine had been told of the finding of a child, and came hastening up just as the soldier finished his tale.

“ And what did you do ?” she asked. “ You shot Leonard, I hope, and brought back the child—where is it ? I am sure it must be Neipperg's child that this wretch had stolen and brought to Baron de Lowendaal,” she added to herself. “ But why don't you speak ?”—turning like a tigress upon the soldier.

The latter shook his head. "Leonard escaped; and as for the child——"

"You surely didn't leave him there?"

"There was no other course. In making off, this fellow you call Leonard set fire to a barrel of powder left there by the Austrians, and had we stayed another second we should have gone up with the castle. There was no time for dragging children about."

"My friends," cried Catherine, "I know there are many brave hearts among you. Who'll come and help me search the ruins of the castle? Perhaps the child is still alive under them. Come, don't all speak at once!"

"We're all dead-beat," said one of the soldiers.

"And we've hardly taken a bite yet," said another.

"We shall have to be in fit condition to-morrow for entering Mons," added a third.

The soldier who had seen the child muttered, "There might still be a chance of getting a bullet in one's back from a wounded Austrian, or of seeing another barrel of powder go up. It's hardly worth risking one's skin for a kid!"

"Then I'll go myself," said Catherine, "and alone too, since Lefebvre is on duty, and you are all too cowardly to accompany me. I promised this child's mother to give her back her boy, and I'll keep my promise. Eat and drink your fill, my boys, and sleep well. Good night!"

"Citoyenne Lefebvre, I go with you," said La Violette, starting up from his seat. His sabre had

lost its scabbard, and his uniform had been torn to rags in clambering over the stockades of Jemappes; his head-gear consisted of the helmet of a captain of the Austrian dragoons. "You know I wouldn't let you go alone across a field of battle, although I've had enough frights to-day to last me a lifetime. Oh! that captain of the dragoons—what a kind man he was! He saw me shaking in my shoes, and, to put me out of my misery, he tried to split my skull. Off went my beaver, and as I couldn't walk about bare-headed, looking as if I had dressed in a hurry, I was obliged to take his helmet. It was no easy job, for he had five of his men round him, and they didn't seem to like the idea of my getting his hat. Oh! they're very obstinate fellows, these Germans, but I got it all the same."

"And did you kill the captain?"

"Yes—I had to. But let's get on, Madame Lefebvre, for at night I'm no coward, as I told you."

In the vaults under the ruins of the Château de Lowendaal Catherine found little Henriot alive and untouched, though nearly frightened to death by the terrible explosion that had taken place over his head, and from the effects of which he had been protected by the heavy masonry that formed the foundations of the ancient keep. Taken back to the camp, the boy, snatched from the jaws of death, was adopted by the 13th Light Infantry, and became the child of the regiment.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## LOVE AND WAR.

TOULON, like Lyons, Marseilles, Caen, and Bordeaux, had become a stronghold of treason; the united Royalists and Girondists had opened the gates of the city and the arsenal to the allied Germans and English. At a time when the monarchs of Europe were leagued together to accomplish the downfall of France, and were seeking to impose laws and a hateful dynasty upon an enfranchised nation, a band of Frenchmen, forgetful both of their past and their duty, had entered into traitorous communication with the enemy, and invoked the intervention of strangers in the settlement of their country's affairs.

Fortunately such energetic men as Robespierre, Saint-Just, Couthon, and Carnot formed part of the Committee of Public Safety that sat in Paris. Crowds of volunteers were found both in the capital and in the provinces to fill the ranks of the armies, and young generals like Hoche and Marceau replaced the Royalist conspirators who had hitherto held the command on the frontiers. Fortunately, too, Fate willed that at this critical juncture the cannon of the

Republican columns besieging Toulon should be entrusted to a young and unknown artillery officer, Napoleon Bonaparte.

The traitorous town of Toulon itself was occupied by a crowd of foreigners, who came from all parts of the Mediterranean. Spaniards, Neapolitans, Sardis, and Maltese jostled each other in the streets, and even the Pope had sent a number of monks charged with the mission of stirring up the feelings of this motley assemblage. The command of the Republican troops, those improvised battalions that formed the nucleus of the future army of Italy, had fallen into strangely incompetent hands. Owing to the desertion and emigration of nearly all the ancient officers belonging to the nobility, privates rose to the rank of generals in less than a week. The commander-in-chief, Car-teaux, a bad painter and a worse soldier, was assisted by a staff whose military capabilities were absolutely *nil*, and the indefatigable emissaries of the Convention, Salicetti, Fréron, and Barras, were therefore of immense service in haranguing the soldiers, inspiring the chiefs with confidence, and insisting upon a struggle to the death.

The siege, was a protracted one. Though all the defiles around Toulon had been recaptured by the Republicans, the place itself still held out, thanks to its mighty fortifications. To carry on a siege requires military knowledge, experience, and coolness—qualities that were all wanting both in the officers and men of this hastily formed brigade. Car-teaux himself, though commander-in-chief, was totally



unacquainted with the range of the artillery under his charge, when chance brought to him the young officer who was to become the master of Europe.

While travelling from Avignon to Nice, Bonaparte had stopped at Toulon to visit his compatriot, Salicetti, the Conventionalist. The latter presented him to Carteaux, who, proud of his own engineering skill, invited him to an inspection of the batteries. Instead of paying the compliments expected of him, Bonaparte only shrugged his shoulders, the cannon being so badly placed that the shot intended to reach the English fleet would scarcely carry as far as the water's edge. Carteaux wished to throw the fault upon the bad quality of the powder, but Bonaparte had no difficulty in proving this explanation to be a false one, and the army commissioners, struck by his reasoning, at once entrusted him with the direction of the siege operations.

In a few days' time, by almost superhuman efforts, he had obtained from Lyons, Grenoble, and Marseilles fresh cannon, ammunition, and officers. He felt that it was useless to carry on the siege in the old-fashioned way, and determined to force the town to surrender by driving off the English fleet. To do this it was necessary to obtain possession of a promontory that commanded the double harbour—"for there," cried Bonaparte, pointing to the strip of land called *L'Eguillette*, "lies the key to Toulon!" A lodgment was soon effected; the English fleet set sail, and Toulon capitulated. The allies were defeated, and Bonaparte had made his mark in the

history of his country. He was immediately raised to the rank of general and sent to Nice, the headquarters of the army of Italy, whence he was, however, recalled ere long to occupy a still higher post.

The National Convention had come to the term of its busy and terrible career, and the Constitution of the Year III. was the legacy it bequeathed to the nation. The Conventionalists, on retiring, had decided that two-thirds of their number were to retain their seats, but this proviso gave rise to an insurrection in Paris. There were few generals in whom the tottering Government could trust, and in a happy moment, Barras, to whom had been confided the maintenance of order, bethought him of the man whose worth he had learnt to appreciate before the walls of Toulon. Bonaparte was as successful against the too-patriotic populace of Paris as he had been against the traitorous citizens of Toulon, and in consequence of his victory was created General of the Interior.

Barras had proposed his appointment in the following terms: "I wish to call the attention of the National Convention to the prompt and skilful manner in which the measures for the re-establishment of order in the capital were carried out by General Bonaparte, and I ask the Convention to confirm my nomination of that gallant officer to the post of second in command of the Army of the Interior."

A few days later Barras himself tendered his resignation, and Bonaparte remained alone in command. At length he held the power he had so long ardently desired, and master of Paris as he now was, he already

cherished the hope of leading the nation. His first thoughts in the new position to which he had risen so rapidly were for his family. He appointed his uncle to be his secretary, and sent fifty thousand francs—the first money paid him by the Treasury—to his mother, contenting himself with the purchase of a pair of new boots and with having some gold embroidery sewn on to an old coat. His brother Louis became his aide-de-camp, with the grade of captain, and a consulate was found for Joseph.

Having thus provided for his family, and sure of rising higher himself—for the Convention could refuse nothing to a man of whose sword they had so much need—Bonaparte commenced to think of matrimony. His ambition was to marry a woman who would bring him not only wealth, but also such influence and social standing as would serve to efface the traces of his former poverty. But the stern, unbending mathematician, the man of iron, was to be ruled like any rustic swain by the turbulent motor that ever influences the actions of men—frequently with disastrous results.

He fell in love.

With all the giddiness of a schoolboy he allowed himself to be entrapped by a vain coquette, already on the wrong side of thirty—a silly, frivolous creature, who never really loved him until the day when he tore the imperial crown from her brow to set it on another's. It was at the house of Madame Tallien, an intimate friend of his protector Barras, that Bonaparte first met the widow of the Viscount de

Beauharnais. She was a creole from the Antilles—a bold but fascinating adventuress, who had travelled in most parts of the world, and who was admitted into fairly good society by reason of the piquant charm of her personality. By her marriage with Beauharnais she had had a son and two daughters, one of whom was to be the mother of Napoleon III. Though the ravages of time, aggravated by the turbulence of her past life, had played sad havoc with her beauty, there was still enough of the latter left with which to conquer the conqueror in their first *tête-à-tête*. In any case Bonaparte left the house a prey to feelings that he had never experienced before. He forgot his ambitious dreams of conquest and glory, forgot the necessities of his family and of himself, thinking only of Yeyette, as the voluptuous creole was called by her more intimate friends.

Josephine by no means deserved to have such extravagant affection lavished upon her, but the young general, whose life had till then been singularly free from amorous attachments, had arrived at an age when an encounter with the woman who answered pretty closely to his long-cherished ideal must inevitably lead to his enslavement. The charming widow was not one of those clever women, one of those blue-stockings whom he held in horror all his life. She was no adept either at smart repartee or at malicious epigram, though she captivated the soldier by conversing on military topics, and by appearing to be intensely interested in his conquests.

Belonging to the old aristocracy by her marriage,

she possessed immense prestige in his eyes. To the Corsican *parvenu*, brought up in the midst of penury, and with scarcely one well-dressed woman among all his acquaintances, this viscountess was the personification of feminine beauty allied to true nobility.

Totally ignorant of the manners and usages of good society, he was unable to distinguish between a really *grande dame*—a being that he had never seen—and this widow with the languishing eyes, who paid his military talent such simple and sincere compliments. What he wanted was a wife who could do the honours of his table, and who would bring him a home, good family connections, and an established social rank.

Josephine answered all these requirements, and was, moreover, reported to be rich.

After his first interview with his *innamorata* at Madame Tallien's, Bonaparte was invited to call at No. 6, Rue Chantierine, a house tenanted chiefly by such as wished to make a great show on small means. Though the modest flat rented by Josephine was furnished in anything but a luxurious manner, the clever widow managed to display herself and her belongings to the best advantage. There was neither wine nor wood in the cellar, but a carriage with two fine horses was waiting for her in the courtyard. Her dress of diaphanous muslin was a marvel of taste and effect, but had cost incredibly little.

Bonaparte's capture was now complete, and without more ado he proposed there and then. Josephine, however, rather surprised by the suddenness of the surrender, hesitated for a moment. Although her

own affairs were in a precarious state, she asked herself whether the good fortune of the young general would last. He was, after all, only a creature of Barras, and, had he not been nominated by the latter, would never have reached his present position. Would the powerful member of the Directorate continue his protection to the young adventurer, or would he view the charming widow's marriage with displeasure?

In order to be perfectly clear upon these points, Josephine determined to consult the cynical magnate himself, and that very evening bade her coachman drive to the Luxembourg, where the members of the Directorate were lodged.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE COUP D'ÉTAT.

A GRAND *fête* was in progress at the Luxembourg when Josephine de Beauharnais was announced. She was dressed according to the latest fashions of the day, but rather with taste than magnificence. A long floating robe of light gauzy material veiled her somewhat opulent charms, though here and there the transparency of the stuff left the beholder no doubt as to the freshness of the well-rounded figure beneath. Her desire was not only to please Barras, but also to eclipse all the beauties who had assembled in his *salons*. Whether she gave her hand to Bonaparte or not, Josephine was in no mood to lose one scrap of her reputation as a fashionable and courted woman. Indeed, her object in coming there that night was probably not so much to hear the director's opinion upon the proposal she had received, as to prove to him that she could still command the admiration and devotion of men who, though younger than herself, were already looked upon as having made their mark.

Having been ushered at her special request into one

of the private apartments in which Barras was wont to receive visitors on business of state, she was soon joined by the great man himself, who, though bestowing upon her a smile of genial welcome, was at heart somewhat uneasy as to the object of her visit. He had not disdained to accept the favours of the seductive creole, but he was in no mind to renew relations that had on both sides been merely the result of a passing whim.

“To what happy chance do I owe the agreeable surprise of this visit, my dear lady?” he commenced.

“They are bothering me to get married again, my dear director,” replied Josephine, “and I want your advice.”

“Well, I think that you can manage to make a man happy,” observed Barras, with a smile. “But may I know who the rascal is that makes so bold——”

“You know him, Barras; he was your second in command.”

“Bonaparte! A lad with a big future before him. If you had seen him directing the artillery fire before Toulon while the bullets whistled around him, you would be persuaded that such a brave man cannot be otherwise than an excellent husband. Oh, he’s a bold fellow!”

“Well, he has desire to protect the fatherless and console the widow.”

“Very praiseworthy; but do you love him?”

“To be frank with you—I don’t. But I can’t say that I dislike him either; in fact, I am very lukewarm



about the whole matter. And that is why I want your advice. I was always too lazy to make up my own mind, and prefer to let others do it for me."

"Then you want me to order you to marry the general?"

"Only to advise me to do so, and to tell me a little more about him."

"First impressions being truest, I can do no better than tell you how he impressed me when first I saw him. Though a man a little below the middle height, and extremely thin, his manners and aspect were peculiarly imposing. His long hair falling carelessly about his ears and shoulders lent him the appearance of a student or ascetic, and showed his contempt for the fashions of our gilded youth. His dark coat, adorned with a very narrow gold embroidery, was buttoned up to his chin, and in his hat he wore a tricolour cockade. At first I thought him ugly, but his pronounced features, his quick and searching glance, and his animated gestures betrayed a great soul beneath this quiet exterior, his broad high forehead, constantly furrowed in thought, truly indicating the extent of his capacities. His speech is brief, and his expressions are not always correct, though frequently he gives vent to ideas that may almost be called sublime. He is a man, Josephine, who will some day be a hero. My advice, in all sincerity, is that you take him, and in time you will learn to love him!"

"At present I must confess to being a little afraid of him."

"You are not the only one. He frightens all my

colleagues—even Carnot, a bloodthirsty Terrorist and an accomplice of Robespierre.”

“If he frightens the directors, you can guess what impression he must make on a woman!”

“Bah! You will be one of the happiest, as you are one of the prettiest women of the Republic, if you marry Bonaparte . . . and I, your old friend, will make you a handsome present on your wedding-day.”

“Really! A diamond pendant like that you gave Madame Tallien?”

“Better than that—the commandership of the army of Italy,” replied Barras; and enjoying Josephine’s speechless amazement, he added, “Take my arm and let me conduct you to the ballroom. I wish to be the first to congratulate Bonaparte on his marriage and his promotion.”

Thus was Napoleon Bonaparte appointed commander-in-chief of the army of Italy on the twenty-third of February, 1796, a few days before his marriage with the fair widow Beauharnais. Two days after this important ceremony had been performed, the caresses he lavished upon his wife were cut short by orders to set out for Italy. In the midst of a troublous campaign, the amorous young husband, frequently worn out with fatigue and with the manifold cares of his high office, never allowed a day to pass without writing a few lines to his Josephine. These would be carried to Paris by flying couriers in the same bag that contained the bulletin of a great battle, or the inventory of standards and artillery captured from the enemy.

Napoleon's first thoughts were ever of his wife. It was in reality for her sake that he sent his friend Junot to Paris to present to the Convention the Austrian standards. On that memorable day the mean-spirited and sensuous creole felt herself to be the Queen of France. Before the assembled troops and the masses, amid the salutes of cannon and the joyous pealing of bells, she rode in triumph through the streets of the festive city, and heard her husband's name re-echoed by a hundred thousand voices. But in spite of all that Bonaparte did for her, it was a long time before she could make up her mind to tear herself from the gaieties of the capital and join him in Italy, as he so ardently desired her to do.

In December, 1797, the campaign being at length over, the couple returned to their modest abode in the Rue Chantreine. The Château de Chambord had been offered Napoleon as a national gift, but he declined presents as well as distinctions of any kind. The only thing he could be got to accept was the title of commander-in-chief of the army formed for the conquest of England.

He was preparing, not without a good deal of ostentation, a gigantic scheme for a descent upon the shores of Great Britain. In reality, he was studying the best means of striking a blow at the implacable enemy of France and the Revolution where it would be most effective. Dreams of endless triumphs in the East enticed him as in days of old, but Egypt tempted him most, and he resolved to gather fresh

laurels for himself and his men on the banks of the classic Nile.

His cooler reason, too, counselled him to absent himself from France for a while. He was not sorry to have an opportunity of proving that without him the Directory could do nought but get into scrapes, and the generals experience nothing but defeats. He was anxious, too, to gain fresh glory, for he knew the fickleness of the mob and the rapidity with which it lost its respect for an idol too often seen. A silly conspiracy, started against him by a few of his enemies in the capital, led him to hasten his departure, and on the 19th of May, 1798, he embarked at Toulon.

The Egyptian campaign, with its naval disasters, its tremendous land battles, and its glorious victories, seemed like a tale from the "Arabian Nights;" and when, towards the end of the following year, Bonaparte returned, the whole population of France rose as one man to greet the great general who had brought honour and renown upon his country.

The *coup d'état* by which he constituted himself First Consul was in reality dictated by the nation. The Directorate had fallen into discredit, and France was weary of being ruled by weaklings. Had Bonaparte not seized the reins of government at that moment, they would undoubtedly have been taken up by Augereau, Bernadotte, or Moreau. With consummate tact he had, therefore, gathered a brave and brilliant staff around him, including not only soldiers, but men learned in law and experienced in diplomacy

There was no necessity for much precaution, every one—or nearly every one—being in the plot. On the ninth of November, 1799—the 18th of Brumaire—at six in the morning, all Bonaparte's military friends assembled at his house on the pretext of proceeding to some review. One general only was wanting in the throng; his absence was immediately remarked by Bonaparte, who cried, "Where is Lefebvre? Can he be opposed to us?"

At that instant the Governor of Paris, who was no other than the husband of La Sans-Gêne, was announced. He, too, had made his way in the world, and that entirely by dint of his own perseverance. From the captaincy gained at Verdun, he had been promoted step by step until he held the chief command of the army of Paris, and in that capacity his concurrence was most indispensable to the success of Bonaparte's plans. But his extremely Republican views made it advisable to keep him in ignorance of what was being done until the moment of striking the blow, and he had therefore had no share in the councils of the future master of France.

At midnight on the eighth, hearing that certain movements of troops had taken place without his knowledge, he had called for his horse and ridden through the city. At the barracks he had found a troop of cavalry ready to start for an unknown destination, and on questioning the commander had been referred to Bonaparte. He was, therefore, in anything but a good humour when he arrived at the general's at six in the morning.

Bonaparte received him with open arms. "What! my old Lefebvre!" he cried. "How goes it? And the good wife, Catherine? Her heart still as warm, and her tongue still as ready as ever, I'll warrant. Madame Bonaparte tells me she has not seen her lately."

"My wife is very well, thank you, general," replied Lefebvre, coolly. "But I have come about other matters."

Bonaparte interrupted him. "Lefebvre, my boy, will you, one of the pillars of the Republic, leave it to perish in the hands of the lawyers? Here, this is the sabre that I wore at the battle of the Pyramids; you shall wear it as a pledge of my esteem and confidence." With these words he handed Lefebvre a magnificent scimitar that had once been the property of Mourad Bey, and the hilt of which was thickly studded with precious stones.

"You are right," said the general, buckling on the sabre; "the lawyers must go."

On the evening of that decisive day—a day that gave France not only a new dynasty, but once more changed her destiny—Lefebvre, embracing Catherine, said to her, "See here, wife—this is a Turkish sabre, fit only for parade or smacking lawyers on the back. . . . We will leave it in its sheath; it will serve to remind us of the friendship of General Bonaparte, a parvenu, like ourselves!"

"But won't you use it?" asked Madame Sans-Gêne.

"No, no. I have my own good sword with which

I fought at Sambre-et-Meuse, and which will still stand me in good stead wherever Bonaparte may lead us—were it into the jaws of hell!”

And General Lefebvre, drawing his faithful spouse towards him, imprinted upon her willing lips a good hearty kiss, as loyal and as pure as his fighting sword.

## CHAPTER XV.

## MADAME LA MARÉCHALE.

THE door of an elegantly appointed sleeping apartment in the Palace of Saint-Cloud was gently opened, and a waiting-maid entered and drew back the curtains that hung round the gorgeously carved bedstead.

“Madame la Maréchale! Madame la Maréchale! It’s ten o’clock.”

A full contralto voice, slightly husky, answered from the depths of the bed. “To the deuce with you! Why can’t you let me sleep?”

“Pardon, Madame la Maréchale! but madame had ordered me to call her at ten o’clock.”

“And is it ten o’clock already? What a lazy brute I’m getting! I used to get up so early, too, when I had my washing to do; and when I kept the regimental canteen, my legs were always out of bed at the first notes of the *réveille*. Now that I’m Madame la Maréchale I can’t leave the sheets. Come along, give me my dressing-gown, and be sharp about it.”

And Madame la Maréchale rose from her couch swearing like a trooper because she did not find her



stockings where she had thrown them when retiring to rest the night before. When the maid had at length found them in some corner of the room, it was another job to get them on, for madame was no easy mistress either to dress or to serve, having lost none of those pretty little ways that had earned for her both at the wash-tub and in the canteen the name of Madame Sans-Gêne.

Since those days events had changed not only the lot of many a citizen, but the whole face of Europe. The artillery officer of Toulon, the impecunious customer of the washerwoman in the Rue Royale, had risen from commander-in-chief to first consul, and from consul to emperor. Military glory had built him up a throne before which even kings were forced to kneel, and the sturdy henchmen he gathered about him had risen from even lower depths than himself.

The prediction of the fortune-teller of Vauxhall had been almost fully realized for Lefebvre and his wife. More fortunate than his friend Hoche, the former sergeant in the Guards had rapidly risen to the highest commands, and, blindly devoted to his emperor, the favour of the latter had never been withdrawn for an instant.

When, in 1804, Napoleon had restored the ancient dignity of marshals of France, Lefebvre had been one of the first to hold it. The victor of Austerlitz well knew the value of the man's presence at the head of an attacking column, though he was not blind to the fact that the valiant soldier was the most ignorant of all his generals.

Often, when some plan was under discussion, Lefebvre, losing all patience at the interminable flow of words, would sweep all the maps and plans from before him and cry out, "To hell with the lot! Get me and my grenadiers before the enemy, and I'll answer for the rest."

Ever respectful towards the emperor, whom he idolized, he carried out to the letter the most difficult order given him by that master of war. Napoleon thought out an idea and Lefebvre executed it. Wherever the emperor sent him, he went straight as an arrow, an irresistible force acting under a mighty impulse.

François Lefebvre was not only an extraordinary soldier, but also an exceptional husband. Though his uniform had changed, he himself had always been the same man to Catherine, and the eagle of the Légion d'Honneur that hung resplendent upon his breast had not in the least disturbed the regular beating of the heart beneath it. The conjugal fidelity of this virtuous couple had, indeed, become a standing joke at the imperial court; but Napoleon himself, who attached much importance to a semblance of morality in those about him, often congratulated Lefebvre and his wife on the excellent example they set the rest—an example, by the way, but little heeded in the imperial family itself.

On the other hand, Lefebvre had frequently to listen to Napoleon's strictures on the free-and-easy manners of Madame la Maréchale.

"Look here, Lefebvre," the emperor would say,

standing on tiptoe to pinch the big soldier's ear, "try to teach your wife not to lift up her skirts as if she were about to jump a ditch when she enters the empress's rooms, and tell her to get out of that habit of swearing like a fishwife on the least occasion. Ah! and something else—are you listening?"

"Yes, sire," the marshal would reply with docility; for though it pained him to hear these remarks, he was forced to acknowledge their justice.

"Well, your wife is eternally at loggerheads with my sisters. My court is not the court-yard of an inn—which any one would suppose it to be on hearing the row set up by these women!"

"Sire, your sisters reproach my wife with her humble origin and her Republican opinions. You and I, though, are out-and-out Republicans——"

"Of course we are," replied Napoleon, smiling at the simplicity of Lefebvre, who, like a good many veterans of '92, still considered himself loyal to the Republic while serving an emperor. For these brave and loyal hearts, Bonaparte was the crowned head of the Revolution.

"Sire," replied Lefebvre one day in answer to one of these commands, "I will convey your wishes to Madame Lefebvre, and I promise you she will conform to them."

"If she can," muttered the emperor. "I don't ask for impossibilities. Early habits last longest."

Stopping in the rapid strides with which he paced up and down the apartment, he growled, "What madness to marry when one is a sergeant!" Then, as a

thought struck him, he added, " But I've made almost the same mistake myself. He married a washerwoman, and I—h'm, well! there's always a remedy at hand in divorce, but——"

As if to chase away these thoughts, he plunged his fingers into the pocket of his white cashmere waist-coat and drew forth a little black snuff-box, the contents of which he smelt without touching. Napoleon never smoked. Once only had he evinced a desire to try a superb hookah with which the Turkish ambassador had presented him. When with some difficulty it had been made to draw, the first mouthful of smoke almost choked him, and flinging the tube from him in disgust, he cried, " Take the thing away! What pigs these men must be to like it!" And since then he had never tried smoking again.

Having smelt his black rappee, the emperor turned to Lefebvre, who was watching his master's furrowed brow with some anxiety.

" Your wife must take some lessons from Despréaux, the famous dancing-master; he is the only one who knows anything about the old court manners."

Maître Despréaux, professor of dancing and deportment, was indeed quite a personage in his way. A pert, graceful little man, he had managed to pick his way through the stormy times of the Terror on tiptoe, and now that the whirlwind had passed and pleasure once more invaded the *salons* that had so long been given up to mourning, the services of the dancing-master had become indispensable. It was on the occasion of his first visit to Madame Lefebvre's

apartments in the palace of Saint Cloud that we find that lady having need of being awakened at ten o'clock. Hurrying down to her drawing-room, she found the professor practising attitudes before a large mirror.

"Ah, you're Monsieur Despréaux, I can see. How are you?" cried Catherine, taking hold of the little man's hand and giving it a rude shake.

The professor, quite taken aback by this unexpected and superfluous heartiness, stammered, "I am at Madame la Maréchale's orders."

"Well, look here, my little man," said Catherine, taking a seat on the edge of a table; "the emperor thinks that the manners of his court are not fine enough. He wishes us to be distinguished. Do you understand what he wants, my lad?"

Despréaux, shocked by the tone and familiarity of the maréchale, replied in his shrill treble voice, "His Majesty is well advised in desiring that his court shall possess that stamp of distinction that marked earlier reigns. I will most respectfully attempt, Madame la Maréchale, to interpret his august wishes; but in order to give his Majesty entire satisfaction, may I know in what particular branch of my art you desire instruction?"

"Well, it's like this, my beauty. There's to be a State ball on Tuesday, and since it appears that they always danced a gavotte in the Tyrant's time, the emperor wants us to learn it. Now, if you've got the article, let me have it."

"Madame la Maréchale, the gavotte is a difficult

dance to learn. I well remember that I had the honour of teaching it to Madame la Dauphine—— ”

“ Well, let's try. If it were only the emperor, I'd tell him to go and teach his gavottes to somebody else. He didn't want me to dance the gavotte when I ironed his shirts. But it's Lefebvre who wishes me to learn, and whatever my old man likes, I like. Now, then—attention ! Show me what I've got to do with my legs.”

As Madame la Maréchale took up her position in the attitude of a fencing-master about to make a lunge, Despréaux shrugged his shoulders and heaved a sigh.

“ Have you ever danced before, madame ? ” he asked.

“ Yes, a long time ago—at Vauxhall.”

“ Never heard of it,” said Despréaux, pursing up his lips. “ And may I ask what dance was the fashion there ? The coranto, the minuet, the monaco ? ”

“ The fricassée.”

“ Heavens ! A dance of washerwomen and gutter-boys ! ” murmured Despréaux.

“ It was the first dance I had with Lefebvre. It was through that we got to know each other and were married.”

The professor shook his head sadly, as if to say, “ To what have we come—I, the dancing-master of Madame la Dauphine ! ”

He set himself conscientiously about the task of initiating Catherine into the noble dance that Napoleon wished to bring into fashion at the court balls, when the door was violently thrown open, and

Lefebvre, in full uniform, stalked into the room. His feelings had evidently been wrought up to a terrible pitch, for throwing his hat to the ground, he cried in excited tones, "Vive l'empereur!"

Then, running towards his wife, he clasped her in a passionate embrace.

"My God! what's the matter?" exclaimed Catherine.

Maître Despréaux, advancing very prettily on tip-toe, inquired, "Is the emperor dead, Monsieur le Maréchal?"

The answer to this question was a vigorous application of Lefebvre's big boot to the lower region of the dancing-master's back, the result being an unrehearsed effect not to be found in the rules of the choregraphic art.

Despréaux picked himself up gingerly, and making Lefebvre one of his best bows, said, "Did Monsieur le Maréchal speak?"

"Don't be so excited, and tell us what has happened," said Catherine. "Despréaux wants to know whether the emperor is dead; but such a thing is impossible."

"Of course it is—impossible! The emperor can't die—he never will die! But what I've just heard is that we're going."

"Going! Going where, old man—I mean, Monsieur le Maréchal?"

"I don't know where. All I know is that we must get there soon. I think it's Berlin."

"Is Berlin far?" asked Catherine, whose geographical knowledge was even weaker than her dancing.

"I don't know," replied Lefebvre; "but nothing is far for the emperor."

"And when do we start?"

"To-morrow. These Prussians want a good hiding. They are getting too cocky. They invaded France some years ago, together with the Austrians, the English, the Russians, and the Spanish, and ever so many other nations besides. They were pardoned because they were a little state, and because they had a great many learned men. The emperor seems to like them. He's always talking about a young fellow called Goethe who writes in the news-sheets. He told me the other day that if he were a Frenchman he would make him a count."

"Well, and so the emperor wants to fight the Prussians?"

"Yes; he astonished us when he said it would be a difficult job. Prussians! Why, a country like that can hardly be said to exist. But the emperor, who understands these things better than I do, makes out that it will be a glorious war. After all, that's his affair. Our business is to fight, and wherever he takes us, we fight. It's rather humiliating, all the same, to have to hunt up a little nation like the Prussians; there's no glory to be got in crushing such weak antagonists."

"Pardon, Monsieur le Maréchal," said Despréaux, keeping at a respectful distance from Lefebvre's boot. "The Prussians had their Frederick the Great, and they still celebrate the battle of Rosbach every year."

"Rosbach!" cried Lefebvre, shrugging his shoulders.



“Don’t know it. Must be ancient history. Besides, the emperor wasn’t there. There could never have been a big battle without him.”

“That’s right enough,” said Catherine. “But am I going with you, Lefebvre?”

“You can come as far as the frontier, if you like; I don’t think the empress will go any further than that. What a bolt from the blue this war is, Catherine—coming upon us so suddenly! But it will be nothing more than a walk over, I assure you. We shall have to get ready at once, though. Where is Henriot?”

“He’s somewhere about the place, waiting for you.”

“Good; I’ll present him to the emperor. Perhaps this war may hasten his promotion. Go and look for him, my dear.”

Catherine soon returned with a young lieutenant, who ran up to Lefebvre and asked eagerly, “Where are we going to fight, godfather?”

“You young beggar, how do you know that you’ll be ordered to go? I must speak to the emperor first. Do you think any one can get permission to be killed for him? I hope, anyhow, that he’ll grant you the honour.”

“Thank you. And when will you present me?”

“At once, if I can. Meanwhile the maréchale will speak to the empress.”

When Catherine entered the Empress Josephine’s apartments, she found all the courtiers in a state of great excitement. The news of the declaration of war had soon spread, and every one was anxious to know whether the emperor had already fixed on a date for

his departure. The empress was besieged with inquiries, to which, however, she was unable to give any definite answer.

"I really know nothing," she replied. "His Majesty has only told me to hold myself in readiness to accompany him as far as Mayence."

"So I heard from Lefebvre," exclaimed Catherine. "I'm going with him, and I shall be jolly glad to find myself amongst the soldiers once more. Ah! your Majesty, one gets so stiff and rusty in a palace! You will feel how nice it is to sleep on a camp-bed. When do we start—to-night or to-morrow?"

"Who can tell?" said the empress, shaking her head. "You know how the emperor manages these things. All is arranged beforehand, and in secret. Every one must be at his post and ready to start at a moment's notice, so that his Majesty may go whenever he wishes. As far as I am concerned, I shall be quite ready to join him when he gives the order for departure."

"I'm used to these sudden alarms; they don't put me out in the least," remarked the *maréchale*. "Has your Majesty seen the emperor this morning, and is he in a good humour?"

"Do you want him to grant you some favour?"

"Yes, madame; I should like to get permission for my godson Henriot to join Lefebvre."

"My dear *maréchale*, you may tell your *protégé* that I will appoint him one of my pages of honour."

"Thank you, madame; but Henriot desires to win his spurs in battle, and not in the drawing-room. He is not the godson of a carpet-knight."

“Well, let him come. I’ve no doubt we shall find him some opportunity of getting killed, since he is so very anxious.”

“Your Majesty is too good!” cried Catherine, enchanted with this promise. At last her adopted child, the son of Neipperg and Blanche de Laveline, was to have a chance of winning glory in the service of the emperor.

Meanwhile Napoleon was reviewing the Guards in the court-yard of the palace. Beside him rode the generals who were to command the different sections of *la grande armée*, as it was afterwards termed: Lefebvre, Bernadotte, Ney, Lannes, Davoust, Augereau, and Soult. After having minutely inspected the men according to his wont, the emperor rode up to the drum-major, a giant whose bearskin towered far above those of his comrades, as he stood proudly erect before the column, ready to march at the word of command.

“What is your name?” he asked.

“La Violette, sire.”

“Where have you served?”

“Everywhere, sire.”

“That’s good,” exclaimed the emperor, who liked brief answers. “Do you know Berlin?”

“No, sire.”

“Would you like to go there?”

“I’ll go wherever my emperor wishes me to go.”

“Well, La Violette, get your drumsticks ready. Within a month you will enter the capital of the King of Prussia, at the head of the regiment.”

"We shall, sire."

"What's your height, man?" asked Napoleon, abruptly, looking in amazement at Catherine's old canteen-help, as the latter drew himself up under his emperor's gaze.

"Six feet two, sire."

"Why, you are as tall—as a poplar!"

"And you, mon empereur, are as great—as the world!" cried La Violette, mad with joy at the honour of speaking to Napoleon, and unable to repress his enthusiasm.

Napoleon smiled at the compliment, and turning to Lefebvre, remarked, "You must remind me of this drum-major some day, marshal."

The emperor continued his inspection, and at the conclusion the grenadiers of the Guard, the legendary phalanx of Jena and of Friedland, with drums beating and colours flying, marched past their idolized master, as he sat with stern and scrutinizing gaze fixed upon them.

As once more they came to a halt, a hoarse shout rose from these stalwart warriors, so many of whom were to find a grave on the Prussian plains.

"Vive l'empereur!"

Napoleon, turning to Lefebvre, observed with evident satisfaction, "I think my royal cousin, the King of Prussia, will soon repent of having challenged us. With such fine fellows as these I would make war on the devil himself, and beat him. . . . Marshal, go and bid your wife good-bye; we start to-night!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

## JENA.

THE war with Prussia had commenced—a war for which Napoleon had prepared with as much prudence, circumspection, and precaution as if the safety of France had depended upon the issue of the first battle. Prussia, on the contrary, relying on its military glory of former days, on its souvenirs of Frederick the Great, and on the too sanguine hopes of its own generals, Brunswick, Blücher, and Mollendorff, rushed into the fight with a reckless impetuosity that could bring only ruin.

A council of war was held at Erfurth on the 5th of October, 1806, under the presidency of the king, Frederick William, at which all the ministers of state and the highest military officers were present. It is, of course, impossible for the most far-seeing strategist to avoid all the blunders that will arise in even the best-managed campaign, but in this war the Prussians were guilty of a grave tactical fault from the very outset of the operations. Instead of advancing to meet Napoleon, who had at his disposal the armies of Southern Germany, they should rather have retreated

and drawn him into the marshy and untenable country in the north, where they might then have joined issue with the Russians.

Such proposals as these were, indeed, being debated in the council; but Queen Louise, who was seated by the king's side, could not repress her indignation at the idea of a feigned retreat before the French, who had never yet braved the Prussian armies, the first in Europe. She urged that the whole nation was now thoroughly aroused, and that nothing would satisfy it but the extermination of the French army and the conquest of the old provinces of Lorraine. There was no other course but to push forward. The first battle would open to them the road to Paris.

"Do you hesitate, sire?" she added. "The people will think you are afraid!"

The king, weak and undecided, would perhaps have preferred to enter into peace negotiations with Napoleon, but he was overridden by his strong-minded queen, and the forward march was resolved upon. In an insolent ultimatum, Prussia demanded the immediate evacuation by the French troops of the Rhine provinces, the date of the retreat not to be postponed later than the 8th of October.

On the morrow of the 8th, however, the French army, far from having made a retreat, crossed the Saxon frontiers in three columns, and Murat, at the head of the cavalry, struck the first blow. It was the battle of Schleitz. A second encounter took place on the 10th, at Saalfeld. Here Prince Louis of Prussia was killed, and Marshal Lannes marched upon Jena.

A terrible panic had seized hold of the Prussians. The streets of the little university town of Jena were crowded with fugitives. The bridges that spanned the Saal were blocked all day by long lines of transport waggons and ambulance carts hurrying across, while the roads as far as Weimar were filled with peasants anxious to get out of the way of the French.

On the 13th of October Napoleon arrived before Jena, and encamped on a hill overlooking the town, pitching his tent in the centre of a square formed by four thousand of his Guards. With prodigious activity he immediately began to bring his artillery into position. Torch in hand, he personally superintended the construction of the batteries—a work of no small difficulty on this rocky hillside.

Though worn out with fatigue, he would take no rest until he had seen the guns all placed, and then, seated on a chair before the camp-fire, he fell asleep, surrounded by his faithful officers and men.

When he awoke a thick mist covered the plain. Accompanied by a few torch-bearers, Napoleon walked through the lines, addressing the men with his usual energy and spirit. One blow more, he told them, would decide the fate of the Prussians, and cut them off from the help they expected in the north.

Amidst loud cries of "Vive l'empereur!" the signal of attack was given, and the memorable battle of Jena commenced.

Though Napoleon commanded in person, victory hung for a moment trembling in the balance, on account of the somewhat too great temerity of Ney

on the one side, and the hesitation of Bernadotte on the other. Had it not been for these regrettable incidents, scarcely a Prussian soldier would have been left to tell the tale of the battle; though, as it was, the Prussian army was practically annihilated, the Duke of Brunswick himself being among the slain.

As Napoleon rode over the field on the evening after the fight, his eyes fell upon the heaps of dead French soldiers, showing all too plainly where the Prussian cavalry had charged. With slackened rein, and hat in hand, he entered the little village of Auerstadt, where the engagement had evidently been hottest, to judge by the men and arms with which the road was literally strewn. Suddenly the emperor perceived a tall, gaunt soldier mounting guard at the door of a grange that stood by the roadside, and, having ridden up to him, he exclaimed, in tones of some surprise, "What the devil are you doing there, drum-major?"

The drum-major drew himself up to his full height, swung his massive stick in the air, and then answered solemnly, "I am waiting for reinforcements, sire."

"Ah! I know you now. You're the drum-major of my grenadiers. Your name is La Violette?"

"Exactly, sire—*en route* for Berlin, as your Majesty was pleased to command."

"Quite right. Don't be afraid; we shall get to Berlin, my fine fellow. The road is open now," said the emperor, with a smile. "But what reinforcements are you talking about?"



“I am unable, sire, to conduct my prisoners to the camp without assistance.”

“Your prisoners! What prisoners?” asked the emperor, with a puzzled air.

“Prisoners I made. They are here—in the grange I’ve put a padlock on the door, and am waiting.”

“So you made prisoners, did you?”

“Yes, sire—a troop of sixty. I was passing along here with my drummers when I came across some dismounted dragoons taking to their heels. I called upon them to surrender—and they did! They probably thought I had my regiment behind me, so they threw down their swords, and I promised them that if they would get into this grange I would save their lives.”

By Napoleon’s orders one of the officers of his suite entered the grange, and immediately returned, corroborating La Violette’s story. The emperor turned to the drum-major.

“Come here!” he cried good-humouredly; and as La Violette advanced, he gave his ear a violent pull.

The man could scarcely repress a cry of pain, but he knew that Napoleon must be in an unusually good temper to pull as hard as that.

“So you, a drum-major, have had the impudence to take prisoners, have you? Ah! well, I suppose I must pay you a ransom for them.” Turning to Rapp, the emperor took from his breast the cross of the Legion of Honour, and, pinning it to the coat of the astonished drum-major, said, “La Violette, you are a brave fellow; henceforth you shall wear the insignia

of bravery. Rapp, have these prisoners conducted to Jena!" And without waiting for the thanks of the man he had just created a chevalier, Napoleon put spurs to his horse and continued his way along the battle-field.

La Violette, his hands resting on his long stick, and his eyes upon his newly acquired decoration, muttered to himself, "Can it be that I'm no coward after all—that I'm a brave fellow? Get out! But the emperor said so!" After a moment or two of deep reflection, he brandished his stick in the air and cried, "I've got it. I know what I must do. I must prove to the emperor that he's not mistaken."

And as he made his way back to his regiment that night across the battle-field he looked about him more than once, muttering, "*Nom de Dieu!* Where can I find some Prussians to kill?"

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As soon as he had returned to head-quarters, Napoleon sent for Marshal Lefebvre. Then turning to his secretaries, who, with their portfolios spread out on their knees, were waiting for him to dictate as he strode up and down the tent, he said to the first, "The corps under the command of Marshal Davoust has performed wonders. The marshal himself had his hat carried away by a bullet that singed his hair, and the tattered state of his uniform bears witness to the intrepidity with which he led his men into the very thick of the fight. He was ably seconded by his gallant staff, all of whom are animated by the same bravery that distinguishes their chief. We have from

thirty to forty thousand prisoners, but more are coming in every moment. From thirty to forty, perhaps sixty, standards have been taken, and three hundred cannon, together with immense stores of ammunition. I hear from the deserters and prisoners that the disorder and consternation in the remnant of the Prussian army is beyond all description."

Napoleon stopped. He seldom wrote himself, his hand being unable to keep pace with the rapidity of his thoughts. The result of his own efforts was generally a mass of hieroglyphics, absolutely illegible, even to himself. The task of his secretaries was, therefore, no easy one, but by force of habit and concentration of attention they had at last succeeded in following his rapid utterances. He knew the difficulty the poor fellows experienced, and always allowed them breathing-time after the dictation of an order, so that they might fill in or rewrite their abridgment while he occupied himself with another subject.

"This will be for the newspapers," he said, turning to his second secretary. "The Queen of Prussia has been in sight of our outposts on several occasions. She is in a continual state of trepidation and fear. On the eve of the battle she inspected her regiment at Jena, and was unceasing in her exhortations to the king and the generals to give no quarter to the French. Blood was what she thirsted after, and blood she has had. The first generals of her own country, Brunswick and Mollendorff, fell at the very opening of the battle."

Napoleon's tone was very bitter, and he stopped to

look for words—he who was generally so precipitate, and who always had such a terrible flow of language at command. The secretary, surprised at this sudden respite, looked up at the emperor uneasily, fearing that he was unwell.

Stimulated by the mute interrogation, Napoleon went on: “Write, sir, write. At Weimar the emperor will take up his quarters in the palace occupied by the Queen of Prussia but a few days ago. What has been said about the queen in France is quite true. She is a woman with a rather pretty face, but with no mind, and absolutely incapable of foreseeing the consequences of her conduct. She is rather to be pitied now, for her remorse must be terrible when she recognizes to what a pass her foolish counsels have brought her husband and her country.”

Napoleon made a fresh pause, as Lefebvre, his uniform all torn, and his hands and face blackened with the smoke, appeared in answer to the summons he had received.

“Ah! here you are, my old Lefebvre!” he cried, shaking the marshal’s hand vigorously. “We’ve done well this time—eh, my boy? What do you think of it?”

“With you and my grenadiers, sire, we shall always do well.”

“The Imperial Guard, under your command, fought grandly.”

“And the cavalry under Bessières fought nobly too,” said Lefebvre, who, unlike the other marshals, was not jealous of his comrades’ successes.

"It has been a glorious fight all round," cried Napoleon; "and you may tell your grenadiers to-night that their emperor is more than satisfied with them."

"Thank you—oh! thank you, sire. The poor fellows will be glad to hear your words, though I may say that they have well deserved them. They marched for fourteen miles without stopping, sire, and fighting all the time."

"I know—I know," cried the emperor; "and I see that your own sword has done some work. It looks more like a corkscrew," he added gaily, drawing Lefebvre's battered weapon half out of its scabbard "I shall have to get you a new one; but I suppose you will be able to get along with your marshal's bâton for a few weeks longer—eh?"

"Of course I shall; but I can get myself a sword, sire," said Lefebvre, in some surprise at his emperor's solicitude.

"Ah! I see you don't understand," said Napoleon. "Never mind! you will later. Look here; what do you think of this? This is a plan drawn up by General Chasseloup, our great engineer."

"Ah, indeed!" replied Lefebvre, indifferently, as his eye travelled over what seemed to him a confused mass of lines and figures that covered a huge sheet lying on the emperor's table. All these geographical intricacies interested him but little, and he could make no more of them than of Hebrew.

"It's a plan of Dantzic," continued Napoleon, "with a study of all the distances, heights, and positions round the town."

“Dantzic, is it? Don't know it—never heard of it,” said Lefebvre.

The emperor, with a smile, replied, “But you will know it very soon, Lefebvre. It is one of the most important towns on the Vistula. It is the staple place of the commerce of the north, and contains immense resources and inexhaustible supplies that will be useful in our campaign in Poland. You know, of course, that we're going to fight the Russians?”

“Indeed! I'm glad of that. I should like to come across something a little tougher than the King of Prussia's soldiers. And when are we going to meet these Russians?”

“Wait a bit—patience, Lefebvre! Russia is a vast empire, and presents great difficulties to an invading force. It is defended by immense frozen plains, across which there are no means of communication. Our soldiers would die of hunger amidst the snows of Poland, and would never reach the great cities of Russia, unless I made sure of the magazines in our rear. That is why I want Dantzic.”

“If you want it, then you shall have it!”

“I hope so; but Dantzic is a strongly fortified place. The King of Prussia will make it his last stronghold. It is defended by a garrison of fourteen thousand Prussians and four thousand Russians. Marshal Kalkreuth, a famous soldier, is the governor, and he is having all the suburbs burnt down in order to give our troops no chance of shelter.” Placing his hand on Lefebvre's arm, Napoleon continued with emphasis,

“Dantzic is really impregnable; that is why I am obliged to ask *you* to take it!”

Lefebvre started. “I—I take it! Why, certainly, sire; with my grenadiers, I’ll take anything!”

Napoleon shrugged his shoulders. “With this—idiot!” he cried, holding Chasseloup’s plan before Lefebvre, who, opening wide both mouth and eyes, looked alternately at the plan and at the emperor, unable to comprehend how one could possibly take a fortified town with a piece of paper, however clever the lines and scribbles on it might be. What could it all mean? He was ordered to take the town of Dantzic. Very well! He would take it by assault, at the head of his grenadiers, and he would have a look at the plans afterwards.

“I’ll go and write the good news to my wife,” said Lefebvre. “It will delight her, and once more she will bless your Majesty for all your kindness.”

Napoleon cast a sidelong look at the old soldier. He was very fond of Lefebvre, whom he regarded as the bravest, though least educated, of his lieutenants. The marshal had always remained true to his intensely Republican principles, looking upon the empire merely as a well-organized revolution, with a government in which the lawyers were replaced by soldiers. Napoleon feared his plain outspoken ways, and did not altogether like the ready tongue of Madame Sans-Gêne, his wife. For a long time he had thought of bestowing upon Lefebvre some high reward for his invaluable services, and a signal mark of his friendship and favour. The siege of Dantzic would

be a good opportunity, and he determined not to let it pass by.

"Your wife?" he replied, somewhat disdainfully, in answer to the marshal's remark. "Ah! yes, I remember—La Sans-Gêne. Are you very fond of this wife of yours, Lefebvre?"

"Whether I'm very fond of my wife?" cried the marshal. "Why do you ask me such a question, sire? Catherine and I idolize each other; we are the same now as we were when she was a laundress and I a simple sergent. Whether I am fond of Catherine? Oh, sire! My emperor, my wife, and my flag are what I hold most dear on earth. I am ignorant, I scarcely ever went to school, and I can do only three things—serve my emperor, love my wife, and defend the eagle with which you entrusted me. But these I *can* do, and I defy the cleverest, the most learned in all your empire, to do them more thoroughly."

"There is no need to get so excited about it, Lefebvre," remarked the emperor, hiding under a smile an idea that had occurred to him, but which he did not deem it advisable to bring forward just then. "I shall not attempt to keep you from your wife's arms—when you have taken Dantzic, and we come back conquerors all along the line. Come, my good fellow, I know that the Maréchale Lefebvre, in spite of her occasional strong language, and her free-and-easy manners, is at heart a good and faithful spouse. People may smile at her ways in secret, but they will bow and scrape before her if I replace the cap of the laundress with a trophy that all will envy."



“Ah! I’m beginning to understand what you said about my sword now,” murmured Lefebvre, scratching his head. “I have already the marshal’s bâton; you want to give me something more. Oh, sire! what is there that I can do for you in return for so much honour?”

“I have told you—take Dantzic!”

“I will!” cried Lefebvre, as with heightened colour and flashing eyes he saluted the emperor and rushed from the tent.

As Napoleon stood gazing after him he murmured, “A brave fellow! And yet these heroes will be useless by-and-by. The fashion of war changes, and men like Lefebvre—and myself—will be seen no more, perhaps. Bah! *qui vivra verra!*”

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE CAPTURE OF STETTIN.

ON the 27th of October, 1806, Berlin was the scene of a spectacle equalling in grandeur the most imposing pageants of antiquity. Like the Roman legions of old, the victorious troops of the *grande armée* were to make their triumphal entry into the capital of a conquered State. The whole population of the city was afoot from break of day. The windows and balconies were packed from early morn with spectators, and even the roofs of the houses were crowded with people eager to see the unique procession.

The broad avenue leading from Charlottenburg to the royal palace was filled with a dense throng made up of all classes of society, patiently waiting for hours in the raw October air. Many were the stories that passed from mouth to mouth of the extraordinary succession of events that had led Napoleon and his army to the gates of Berlin ; but so intimidated and awestruck were the German citizens by the completeness of the conquest, that not a single cry of anger or hatred was heard against the conquerors.

The curiosity to catch a glimpse of the great Napoleon, the hero of forty pitched battles, and also the desire to see a march past of troops that were considered invincible and the finest in the world, had overcome the feelings of pain and humiliation that were but natural in the hearts of a subjugated people. It was said, too, that this was the first time that the French Cæsar had insisted upon the honours of a triumph, and Berlin had thus the sad privilege of being the scene of a memorable and unique spectacle.

At length the Charlottenburg gates, which had been kept closed all the morning, were thrown open, and a subdued murmur of expectation, mingled with many a sigh of sorrow and shame, broke from the serried masses.

In accordance with the promise made by the emperor, the first to enter the city of Berlin at the head of the victorious army was the gigantic drum-major of the grenadiers of the Guard. As he strode through the noble arch that marks the boundary of the city, his bearskin towering high above the heads of the citizens, La Violette swung his massive stick more enthusiastically than ever, while the star pinned on his breast by the hand of the emperor himself seemed to lend some of its brightness to its owner's face. Behind the drummers came that grand column of giants that was for years the admiration of Europe—the Imperial Guard—the noble veterans that were mowed down at last by Maitland's brigade on the plain of Waterloo. Following them came the rest of the infantry who had taken part in the battle of

Jena. Then a break—and on came a brilliant staff, among which Davoust, Lefebvre, Berthier, and Augereau were easily distinguishable. Another break, and then the emperor himself rode by in solitary grandeur on his famous white horse, while at some distance behind him came a forest of cavalry that struck admiration into the hearts of the gaping crowd.

Master of Berlin, Napoleon, after having formally accepted the keys of the city, received a deputation of the magistrates, and did his best to reassure them as to his intentions. Most severe orders were issued for the maintenance of discipline, and for the prevention of any disturbances between the soldiers and the people.

As soon as the municipal authorities had withdrawn, the emperor was about to commence work with his secretaries, when word was brought in to him that Marshal Lefebvre desired an audience of his Majesty.

“Let him come in,” cried Napoleon. “Lefebvre has no need of an order of admission. I let kings await my pleasure, but not my marshals.”

“He has a young lieutenant with him, and he feared lest your Majesty might not be able to receive him.”

“Let him come in, I say, with his lieutenant.”

The young lieutenant whom Lefebvre wished to present to the emperor was Henriot, his godson.

Fixing his gaze on the young man, Napoleon asked in his usual brief way, “Your age?”

“Twenty-one, sire.”

“In the 4th Hussars, I see. Your general is Lasalle—you are Marshal Lefebvre’s godson?”

“The *maréchale* adopted him, sire, on the field of battle—at Jemappes,” said Lefebvre, replying for his *protégé*, who felt rather timid in the great man’s presence.

“A fine fight, Jemappes! And so you received your first real baptism of fire at Jena. That was a good beginning, captain!”

“In what regiment, sire?” asked Henriot, in a simple tone.

The emperor started. He was a great admirer of ready wit, and the smartness of the young man’s reply pleased him.

“I see; I dubbed you captain, did I?” he said, with a smile. “Well, captain you shall remain—in the same regiment. If there is no post vacant, Murat or Lasalle must get you one after the next fight. There will be plenty of promotion for everybody before this campaign is over.”

Lefebvre stepped forward. “Sire, I thank you for our adopted son; the *maréchale* will be delighted. The grade that you have conferred upon the lad he has well deserved, and you have done justice to a brave soldier.”

“Is he your pupil, Lefebvre?”

“One of whom I am proud, sire. Tell the emperor what you did, my boy, so that his Majesty may know you have earned his favour,” he added, turning to the young officer.

Henriot blushed and hesitated.

"Come, come, you didn't tremble like that before Stettin."

"The emperor is more formidable than Stettin," murmured the young captain.

"You took Stettin, though!" cried the Marshal.

"Oh!" exclaimed the emperor, with an amused smile. "This hussar took Stettin? Let me hear the explanation of that riddle. I've just heard of the unexpected capitulation of the town, but have had no particulars yet. You didn't take a well-fortified place like Stettin all alone, I suppose?"

"I had a squad of hussars with me, sire," replied Henriot, modestly.

Lefebvre again interposed for his godson. "It's exactly as he says, your Majesty; it was a gallant piece of business. It seems that General Lasalle, riding through a deserted district at the head of his hussars, had somewhat lost his bearings. Seeing a biggish kind of village in the district, he sends Lieutenant Henriot and a squad of men to reconnoitre."

"Only a squad! How imprudent! Go on, Lefebvre."

"Henriot gallops off, and soon comes to the walls of a large town, apparently well garrisoned and fortified. . . . Finish, Henriot; tell his Majesty what happened next."

By this time Henriot had become a little bolder.

"Surprised at finding myself before a town of such importance—which I had been told was only a village—I stopped."

“Lasalle is as brave as you are, Lefebvre, but he is just as ignorant in geography,” said the emperor. “Go on, captain.”

“For a moment I was undecided what to do,” continued Henriot, with rather more assurance, encouraged by the evident good will of the emperor ; “but I had been perceived by the garrison, and their guns were already levelled against me. Had I given my men the order to turn, we should probably have received a full volley in our backs, and none of us would have returned to apprise the general of the existence of this fortified place, while the main body of our cavalry, coming up in open order, would have fallen an easy prey to the murderous fire directed against them from the ramparts. Without knowing exactly what was best, I drew my sabre, and cried, ‘Forward!’”

“Very good!—and then?” asked the emperor, becoming greatly interested.

“Seeing us make for the drawbridge, an officer appeared upon the walls. I ordered a halt, and drawing my men up in line, I summoned the commander of the place to surrender. The drawbridge was lowered, and we were allowed to pass in. I immediately despatched a corporal to General Lasalle, and an hour later my chief entered Stettin, the governor handing him the keys, and the garrison laying down their arms.”

“How many men?”

“About six thousand.”

“It was a splendid feat, and I congratulate you,

captain; I beg your pardon—colonel,” said the emperor, correcting himself. “The taking of a citadel with a handful of cavalry is well worth that rank Lefebvre, I compliment you on your godson’s prowess, and you will see that Rapp sends me his commission to-day for signature. Let him accompany you to Dantzic, from which town I hope you will send me good news ere long. *Au revoir*, colonel; I shall keep my eye on you. I must read Lasalle’s report, and forward the recital of this splendid action to Talleyrand, for insertion in the bulletin of the *grande armée*.”

Hereupon Napoleon, with a cordial hand-shake, dismissed the marshal and his godson, who both left the palace in a state of the highest exultation.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

## CATHERINE UNDERTAKES A MISSION.

MARSHAL LEFEBVRE was seated in his tent, listening with some impatience to a report that was being read to him by an aide-de-camp. Unable to control himself any longer, he struck the small table before him a violent blow with his clenched fist, and interrupting the reader, growled—

“Skip all that rubbish—I know how many troops I have! Six thousand Poles who get dead drunk daily; two thousand two hundred men from Baden, as weak as rats; five thousand Danes who were well thrashed by me at Jena, and upon whom I’ve got to keep my eye, for I believe they have more sympathy for the King of Prussia than for Napoleon. Those are all the troops the emperor has given me with which to take this d——d town.”

“Monsieur le Maréchal forgets the 2nd Light Infantry,” remarked the aide-de-camp.

“By God, I don’t! But I’m not going to have them shot down in the plain like a brace of partridges. I must keep them for the attack. Ah, if I only had my grenadiers!”

“Has Monsieur le Maréchal any orders for the *chasseurs*?”

“What orders can I give them? Two fine regiments of cavalry, but what the devil can I do with them here? Stettin, it is true, was taken by a handful of horsemen, but that doesn't happen every day. The only use to which I can put these fine fellows is sentry duty.”

Giving himself up entirely to the dismal thoughts that filled his mind, he muttered, “What a hole the emperor has let me into this time! I have in all three thousand Frenchmen with me. And with these three thousand men I am to take a city that is considered by all to be impregnable. How does he expect me to do it—and with my men half frozen with cold, too? It's a pretty pickle I'm in!” And the marshal, impatient at the long and tedious siege operations, stamped his feet in impotent rage.

The siege of Dantzic was being carried on in conformity with the traditional and recognized mode of warfare. It was the first important siege that Napoleon had undertaken, and it had necessitated long preliminary operations. Ever since the day on which the marshal had left Berlin, accompanied by Henriot, the works had been both energetically and scientifically proceeded with by General Chasseloup, who enjoyed the full confidence of Napoleon. The conscientious engineer would not deviate one hair's breadth from the course he had mapped out for himself—much to the despair of Lefebvre, who was continually and impatiently looking forward

to the day when he might lead his men to the attack.

The cold was very severe, but, thanks to the care of the marshal, the men were fairly comfortable in their quarters, and the discipline was excellent. Like an old charger that scents the fray from afar, and paws the air in his impatience to hear the trumpets sound the charge, Lefebvre almost wept with rage as he saw delay upon delay intervene, and yet no chance of capturing the city.

On the day that we find him in his tent a council of war had been summoned. General Chasseloup commanding the engineers, General Kirgener in charge of the artillery, and General Schramm had come to confer with the marshal.

“Well, gentlemen, is this business soon coming to an end?” he asked, on seeing them enter. This was his refrain whenever he came across his *bêtes noires*, as he called his not less patriotic, but less impatient, colleagues.

“It will not be long now, Monsieur le Maréchal,” replied General Chasseloup; “we are getting closer.”

“And shall we soon be able to make the attack, or are you going to keep us here for ever?” cried Lefebvre, who suspected these “scholars” of a desire to postpone the real fighting as long as possible.

“Monsieur le Maréchal,” said Chasseloup, politely, “kindly glance at this plan. Here is the boundary of Dantzic, and here are two of our earthworks separated by a small village called Schildlitz.”

“Why haven’t we taken it?”

“ We shall take it in a week’s time.”

“ Why not before ? ”

“ Because we must first make a false attack on the Bischofsberg, to the right here.”

“ Well, and after the false attack ? ”

“ You will order a real one on the left—on this redoubt called the Hagelsberg.”

“ Good ! It makes no difference to me whether it’s to the right or to the left, as long as we fight somewhere.”

“ Fight we shall, Monsieur le Maréchal, be assured of that,” replied Chasseloup.

“ The sooner the better. Why this delay ? ”

General Chasseloup endeavoured to make the marshal understand the real difficulties of the immense task with which Napoleon had entrusted him, and to initiate him into the complicated art of carrying on a regular siege. It was not a question of hurling columns of infantry against the walls of a fortified city and carrying the bastions with a rush. It was an underground battle that was being fought, and the pick-axe and spade were the weapons instead of the bayonet. By the throwing up of trenches and earth-works the sappers and miners would make their way along until they were close under the walls.

“ Well, and what will happen when they get there ? ” asked Lefebvre with sudden interest.

“ Then our cannon will have to make a breach in the walls, and the *débris*, by filling up the moat round the city, will form a kind of bridge across which your soldiers will be able to make their attack.”

“Ah! I see now. You want to make a hole in this cursed wall? Well, make it as quickly as you like, and I’ll answer for the rest.”

General Chasseloup then went on to explain what progress had already been made in this way on the side of the Hagelsberg, and pointed out that sallies might be expected on the part of the enemy to harass them in their labours.

“I thank you, gentlemen, for your information,” replied Lefebvre. “Never having had anything to do with moles, I don’t understand much about this mining business. But it doesn’t matter; I see that you’re making me a hole through which to enter. I thank you, and in my next report to the emperor I shall not forget to mention all about your outworks and trenches.”

The opening of the tent was raised, and Henriot appeared in a state of great excitement.

“What’s the matter now? Have you taken Dantzic with your men?” asked Lefebvre, who always loved to have his joke at the expense of the cavalry.

“No, Monsieur le Maréchal; I have some news. News for the army, and news for you.”

“Then let’s have the army news first,” said the marshal.

“The 19th and 44th regiments of the line will soon be here with a detachment of artillery.”

“Bravo! These are the reinforcements I expected,” cried Lefebvre, with enthusiasm. “The emperor has kept his word. Gentlemen, I know these men of the 19th and the 44th, and I give you my word that

before a month is gone we shall be inside the town . . . And what is your other piece of news, my boy?"

"Madame la Maréchale has arrived in the camp."

Lefebvre bounded from his seat with an oath.

"The devil she has!" he cried. "And what does she want here? Has anything gone wrong in Paris? We have no room for women before Dantzic—what with the snow, and the outworks, and the trenches, and all the cursed bother of a siege that seems to have no end!" Somewhat relieved by this outburst, he added with evident pleasure, "I shall be very glad to see my Catherine, though, all the same. Take me to her at once, Henriot; and you, gentlemen," turning to the engineers, "try and make that hole as soon as possible. The maréchale would be delighted to see me take Dantzic."

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The meeting between the husband and wife was simple but affectionate. As soon as the first effusion of feeling was over, Lefebvre asked, "And what brings you here?"

"A State mission," replied the Maréchale.

"Who entrusted you with it?"

"The empress."

"Does she want to know how long it will be before I take Dantzic?"

"No; she wants to know what the emperor's feelings are towards her."

"Why? The emperor, as she must know, is still intensely attached to her, although she has often led him a pretty dance in the past. But I suppose, being

no longer so young as she was, she is quieting down a bit—eh? And is her conscience beginning to prick her? Perhaps you'll tell me that she has fallen in love with her husband, after all."

"She adores him."

"It's time she did. She should have entertained these fine sentiments years ago, when Napoleon was nothing more than commander of the army of Italy. In those days Josephine had others to pay her court—Barras, Hippolyte Charles—the beautiful Charles, as he was called—and a dozen others. How the man loved his wife then! It was a delirium, a fever!"

"Yes, I've heard some strange stories of those times. They say that while he was at Milan he despatched two or three couriers a day to Paris to implore his wife to come to him."

"Yes, that sort of thing lasted till he came back from Egypt. Then he learnt something of the truth. He suffered terribly, but at last he forgave her. I don't believe in that kind of forgiveness, though, for I know that the injured husband had some thoughts of divorce, and what Bonaparte hinted at Napoleon may carry out. And this is perhaps the great mission with which you have been entrusted, eh?—to plead for Josephine against a threatened divorce?"

"No; I believe the emperor is still attached to his wife. He took the important step of having his marriage with her hallowed by the Church, and I myself don't think he would return to the idea of a divorce after all these years. But Josephine is afraid."

“Is her conduct such as would give the emperor fresh cause for complaint?”

“Oh dear, no! The empress is no longer young; she is thirty-seven and comes from a country where women age quickly. She was a mother at sixteen, and is now almost an old woman. Her present life is absolutely blameless.”

“Well, with what does she expect the emperor to reproach her, then?”

“That she has borne him no children.”

“True,” replied Lefebvre, thoughtfully. “The fact of being childless is a cruel blow to Napoleon. He feels that all his conquests are in vain, and that though he is master of the present, the future has nothing in store for his dynasty.”

“I think the emperor must resign himself to having no heir direct. In that case, do you think his brother Joseph will succeed him?” asked Catherine, somewhat anxiously.

“H'm! his brother? No, wife, he hasn't sense enough. I think that, if Napoleon has no children of his own, he will certainly adopt the descendants of Josephine by her first marriage—the Queen of Holland and her child—especially the child.”

“What! you mean little Napoleon Charles and his mother Hortense?”

“Just so,” replied Lefebvre, with a broad smile. “People talk about the extraordinary likeness of the boy to the emperor——”

“Then people won't talk about that any longer, old man,” cried Catherine, interrupting her husband.



"The boy is dead, and I have to tell the emperor!"

"Dead!" exclaimed the marshal; "you don't say so! Well, I'm sorry to hear that. Napoleon will be distracted; he was very fond of the child, and its death will upset his calculations. I know our emperor a bit, and affection, sentiment, and all the rest of it must make way for questions of policy. I am afraid to think how he'll take your bad news! He won't thank you for being the bearer."

"Bah! I'll let him go on as much as he likes; I'm not afraid. I don't carry my tongue in my pocket; you know that."

"But," continued Lefebvre, "that surely doesn't explain your sudden arrival in the camp. Why has the empress entrusted *you* with the announcement of this piece of bad news? And why on earth have you come to Dantzic? There's no emperor here. You can scarcely have come through the snow for the pleasure of seeing an old bear like me?" he cried, giving his wife a good hug.

"I wanted to hear your advice before speaking to the emperor."

"What advice can I give you?"

"I want you to tell me what reply I'm to give Napoleon."

"Before I can tell you that I must know what he's going to say to you."

"Perhaps you do," replied Catherine, who occasionally took a keen delight in tantalizing her "old man."

“Damn it all, woman—come to the point. What message have you from the empress; what is your real secret?”

“Listen to me, Lefebvre, and try to understand——”

“*Try* to understand! If you knew what these cursed engineers try to cram into my head with their plans and their figures, you wouldn’t mistrust my capacities for understanding. Come, I’m all ears.”

“Well, the death of this boy has caused the empress not only grief, but fear—fear that the emperor may abandon and even repudiate her for another, now that the throne is left without an heir. Though I believe, as I told you, that Napoleon loves his wife as much as ever, he must recognize now that all chances of an heir direct are hopeless; all the physicians, magicians, and priests in the world cannot bring about the desired result. It would, therefore, be easy to convince him of the desirability of contracting an alliance with a younger woman. Lucien, Talleyrand, and others are continually harping upon a divorce, and exciting the emperor’s vanity by pointing to a possibility of a union with a princess of one of the reigning houses of Europe. The empress has, of course, heard something of all this, and expects to hear the emperor propose a divorce in the interests of the dynasty. To ward off this blow she has hit upon a plan which is both bold and ingenious.”

Catherine paused, and Lefebvre, looking at her inquiringly, said, “I am afraid I am no hand at guessing ingenious plans, wife.”

“Do you remember a tall elegant brunette named

Eleonore de la Plaigne, who was formerly in the suite of Princess Caroline ?”

“I do ; she married one Jean Revel, a quartermaster in the 13th Dragoons, who was afterwards imprisoned for forgery. By the clemency of Napoleon she was allowed to remain at court ; but what has she to do with the empress ?”

“She has a son who is alleged to be the emperor’s child !”

“The devil ! Are there proofs ?”

“Indisputable proofs, which, pardon me, you will leave to us matrons to bring forward.”

“Us ! Have you or any others the intention of palming off this boy upon the nation as its future emperor ?”

“Why not ? The empress has consulted the first lawyers in the land, and she is told that the Roman law permits adoption. I’ve heard all the arguments, and I tell you, old man, I’m strong on adoption. The greatest emperors the world has seen—even Augustus himself—practised adoption. With the consent of the Senate——”

“All right, all right, wife ; I see you know all about it. What other emperors have done, our emperor can do ; and as for the Senate——” Here Lefebvre merely shrugged his shoulders in silent contempt. “But tell me,” he added ; “is it on this mission that you are going to the emperor at Finckenstein ?”

“Exactly. The existence of this child having been brought to the notice of the empress just as the death of her grandson plunged her into despair, she has

seized upon this idea of adoption as a last hope. Conquering all feelings of repugnance, she will herself act as a mother to the child, while the people and the army, accustomed to admire every act of Napoleon, will applaud the heroic courage of the imperial couple. In any case, this boy, with the blood of the emperor in his veins will certainly be preferred to Joseph or Louis, Napoleon's good-for-nothing brothers. The nation knows them for what they are—vain ambitious fools, perhaps rogues, ready to desert their brother at the first opportunity in order to save the crowns he has set upon their head. This child, brought up at the side of Napoleon and Josephine, treated by every one as the prince imperial, will not meet with any resistance when he is one day called upon to ascend the throne. That is the proposal I have to lay before Napoleon in the name of the empress."

Lefebvre shook his head dubiously. He did not think that Josephine's proposal would be particularly pleasing to the emperor, and he freely expressed his fears regarding the success of Catherine's mission.

"But you have undertaken to perform a duty, wife, and must not be found lagging. We will start you on your journey at daybreak; to-night we will dine *en tête-à-tête*. As a rule, I take my meals at the same hour as my men, and frequently out of the same pot. But to-night I will order something special in your honour. What shall it be?"

"Do you remember the tripe we used to get at La Rapée, and the white wine with which we washed it down?" said Catherine, smacking her lips.

“Rather! They have excellent tripe here. Tripe and onions it shall be. But I’m afraid I can’t give you the white wine of those days. We shall drink some good old Hungarian, though, that the Archbishop of Bamberg sent my chaplain; for you must know, wife, that I have a chaplain now.”

“A chaplain! Oh, that’s good!” cried La Sans-Gêne. “Why, you scarcely know how to say your *Pater!*”

“Ah! but I’ve been brushing it up a bit lately; the emperor likes it. We are obliged to be very religious in Poland, and to drink a good deal too; it flatters the people.”

“I say, Lefebvre,” cried Catherine, in alarm, “what with your priest and your wine, I hope you’re not getting into bad habits in this beastly hole?”

“Did you say hole? I only wish these cursed engineers would make one. Don’t you be afraid. As soon as I see the hole, I shall not be here long, I can tell you!”

The table was soon laid in simple fashion for the frugal meal, and by the time that Catherine, nothing abashed by the coming and going of the marshal’s orderlies, had made a camp toilet in her husband’s tent, the fragrant dish, flanked by a couple of bottles of good Tokay, had made its appearance.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## FATHER AND SON.

THE maréchale was delighted next morning at being awakened once more by the trumpet-call, a sound that conjured up so many joyful memories of her past life. She fancied herself back again in the camp of the Republican army, where the ragged volunteers rushed to the fight singing the martial strains of the *Marseillaise*, and seldom finished the day without having gained a victory.

Full of these thoughts, she was rather long in dressing, and had only just completed her toilet when the marshal returned from his usual morning tour of inspection, looking very pale and agitated.

“What’s the matter?” cried Catherine, on seeing him enter the tent. “Have you lost ground, or has there been any blundering in the night?”

“No, no—all is safe; but something has happened which touches us very closely.”

“Oh my God! What is it? Speak!”

“Henriot—our dear Henriot, whom we have learnt to look upon almost as our son——”

“Is he dead?” cried the maréchale, while tears of anguish rolled down her cheeks.

"No, no."

"What, then—wounded?"

"No—a prisoner."

"Is that all?" cried Catherine, with a sigh of relief. "You fool, how you frightened me! It's not pleasant to be taken prisoner, but it's not dangerous. You will get him exchanged at the first opportunity. I hear that you make prisoners enough daily."

Lefebvre responded with a sad shake of his head. "As soon as I heard that Henriot had been taken prisoner, I sent a messenger to Marshal Kalkreuth offering him two officers and ten men in exchange."

"Henriot was well worth that. And didn't this Prussian accept at once?"

"No; he refused."

"Why?"

"Henriot is not regarded as a prisoner of war, but as a spy, caught stealing into the town in disguise," replied Lefebvre, in a voice broken with emotion.

"Henriot a spy! Get along! A brave soldier like him does not play the spy; he fights sword in hand under the flag of his country. Marshal Kalkreuth may be an old fool, but has he no sensible men about him?"

"Unfortunately, wife, appearances are against Henriot. He was not taken in fight, but arrested in the streets of Dantzic, wearing the uniform of an Austrian officer."

"Good Heavens! What was the reason of his disguise?"

"I was as surprised as yourself when I heard of it;

but La Violette, whom I have severely reprimanded for aiding the lad in his escapade, seems to know all about this mad freak, in which a brave and loyal French officer is made to look like a miserable spy."

"There is some love-story at the bottom of it, I'll be bound."

"There is some wretched love-story, as you say."

"Henriot is young, gallant, and well capable of both feeling and inspiring a deep passion. Whatever he has done, I absolve him!"

"Just like the women!" said Lefebvre, shrugging his shoulders. "They would discover the hero of a novel in every young man they come across, especially if he indulges in follies."

"And how came Henriot to be guilty of this folly?"

"A military *attaché* of the Austrian consulate with whom he is acquainted came into our camp on some neutral business, and was induced to lend our boy his uniform and his pass for a few hours; that is how the young fool got into the town."

"And was he recognized?"

"Denounced by the Austrian consul-general, who met him and saw at once that he was no officer of his."

"What do you propose doing to save him—for I suppose he is condemned to be shot?"

"Of course he is. To be found masquerading in a besieged town is a capital crime. The laws of war are inexorable," said the marshal, gravely. "If I found



a Prussian officer in my camp wearing a borrowed uniform, I could not possibly save him from being shot down as a spy."

"Then can nothing save him?"

"Nothing but a miracle. Now, if I could only storm the town at the head of my grenadiers——"

"Why not?" cried Catherine, enthusiastically. "It is doubly your duty!"

Lefebvre shook his head in despair. "I cannot! I have not the power."

"Not the power! You—a marshal of France!"

"Listen, wife. As soon as I heard that Henriot was taken and condemned to be shot, I was on the point of doing exactly what you urge—of beating the call to arms and making an attack upon the town at the head of the handful of men I have with me. But I was prevented. I was assured that Mortier was on the road with fresh regiments and artillery; that it would be madness to risk an attack upon the town without waiting for these reinforcements; and, last of all, my colleagues reminded me that the emperor had commanded the siege to be conducted on strictly scientific lines. These engineers have me in a corner—they say towns like Dantzic are not taken by enthusiasm or bravery. The battle must be won by plans and calculations that I know nothing at all about, but with which the emperor seems to be highly delighted. General Chasseloup showed me a note from him in which he approves of all that is being done. So I put my sword back in its scabbard, and gave up all hopes of saving Henriot. What is the

use of being a marshal of France if one may not lead a battle because he has not been to school long enough? But damme," he cried, in a burst of frenzy, "was it such men as I, or was it these wretched schoolmasters and scribblers, who fought and won the glorious battles of the past fifteen years?"

"Then Henriot must die?" asked the *maréchale*, bringing her husband back to the subject that agitated her.

"Alas! I am afraid so; but, by God! I will avenge him as soon as I enter Dantzic. I swear to you that this wretch Neipperg who denounced him shall fall by my hand."

Catherine started up with a cry on hearing Lefebvre utter the name of Neipperg.

"What was that you said? Repeat that name," she exclaimed.

"The Comte de Neipperg, the Austrian consul-general; he is an implacable enemy of Napoleon."

"Don't you know who he is, and where I have met him before?"

"Do you know him?"

"Yes. Don't you remember the night at Jemappes, when I took the place of Blanche de Laveline at the altar, and was saved from being shot as a spy through the intervention of an Austrian officer? Well, that was the Comte de Neipperg!"

"Great Heavens! Then I owe this murderer of Henriot your life?"

"Not exactly—for he owed me his; and as the life of an Austrian commander was probably worth more

than that of a poor vivandière, I am not inclined to cry quits yet."

"He owed you his?" repeated Lefebvre, in blank astonishment.

"Yes, yes; you're always so full of your military matters that you never remember anything I tell you. . . . Carry your mind back to the Tenth of August, 1792."

"Shall I ever forget it? It was the day I became a lieutenant."

"After the fight at the Tuileries a wounded man came to take refuge in my shop, and I hid him in my room; he was a Knight of the Dagger——"

"Ah, yes! I remember. I was a bit jealous of him."

"That man was Neipperg. I told you we were not quits yet. Lefebvre, I must get into the town of Dantzic by hook or by crook."

"You are mad! You—the Maréchale Lefebvre—get into the besieged city! Do you want them to keep you as a hostage?"

"I must speak to the Comte de Neipperg."

"You wish to beg for mercy for Henriot? It would be useless; it is too late now."

"I *will* go to Dantzic, and I *shall*!" cried the maréchale. "When the Comte de Neipperg has heard what I have to say to him, he will rather shoot himself than see his—I mean our—boy shot."

The worthy marshal and his wife had never heard of the marriage of Blanche de Laveline with her lover, the Comte de Neipperg; and when, after the

battle of Jemappes, they had adopted the child found under the ruins of the Château de Lowendaal. Catherine, fearing to tell her husband and the regiment that the boy was the child of an Austrian officer, had professed her ignorance regarding the name of his father.

This secret she meant to use only as a last resource in saving the young man's life, and, without waiting for any further objections on the part of the marshal, she rushed from the tent bent on accomplishing her mission of love.

\* \* \* \* \*

Whenever there was a temporary lull in the cannonade that was kept up day and night between the batteries on the walls of Dantzic and the redoubts held by the French, a hasty and surreptitious interchange of communications invariably took place between the half-famished citizens and the few traders and farmers who still stuck to their homes in the immediate neighbourhood of the town. This harmless though unofficial procedure—unavoidable in all long sieges—was good-naturedly tolerated by the authorities on both sides, and it was during one of these intervals that Catherine Sans-Gêne determined to make her way into the town, accompanied by the faithful La Violette, who had obstinately insisted on sharing her perilous adventure.

The drum-major had doffed his brilliant uniform and replaced it with one of the long overalls worn by the Jewish pedlars of Poland, while his companion had donned the garb of a peasant woman. In this

guise they made their way to the gates, where Catherine, who spoke the fluent German of her native Alsace, had no difficulty in cajoling the officer on duty to allow her to visit her friends living, as she alleged, in the town.

Accustomed to the order and precision of the camp, the mere contemplation of the 'horrors of existence within the walls of a besieged town, crowded to overflowing with famine-stricken fugitives and wounded soldiers, sickened them, and for a few moments the utter disorder and confusion on every side left them undecided what was best to be done.

Though fearing detection by displaying ignorance of the ins and outs of the place, Catherine at last summoned up courage to inquire for the house of the Austrian consul.

Having reached it, the bold masqueraders found all the doors firmly locked, and it was only after repeated pulls at the great bell that awakened the echoes of the old house, and a deal of parleying with the surly janitor who appeared at the wicket, that they effected an entry. Tramping along a labyrinth of corridors and ascending innumerable flights of stairs, the couple were at length ushered into the presence of the count, who appeared anything but pleased at the intrusion of these country-people—evidently beggars of some description or other.

“Who are you, and what do you want?” he asked his visitors in a stern voice, as soon as they had crossed the threshold.

The *maréchale* threw back the cloak that enveloped

her head and shoulders, and, drawing nearer to the consul, said in a calm voice, "Don't you know me, Monsieur de Neipperg?"

The count started up with a cry of surprise. "Yes! you are Catherine Sans-Gêne, the woman who saved my life! Can I ever forget you?"

"Monsieur de Neipperg, I am now the wife of Marshal Lefebvre."

"And you are here! My God! is the town taken?"

"Not yet. I am come a little before my husband—that's all—to save my son's life."

"Your son!"

"Yes; the officer taken last night as a spy."

"Ah! true; he bears the name of Lefebvre. But, great Heaven! how was I to know he was your son?"

"Am I too late? Has he been shot?"

"No, not yet. But I fear it is too late to save him," answered Neipperg, in despairing tones. "He pretended to be an officer attached to my consulate, and my duty to our allies compelled me to denounce him. If I had only known—if I had only known!"

"Can you do nothing now?"

"I am afraid not. To tell the authorities now that he is the son of Marshal Lefebvre would simply be to hasten his death, his sentence being strictly in accordance with the rules of war."

Catherine buried her face in her hands for a few moments, and Neipperg, respecting her grief, scarcely dared to break the painful silence.

At length the *maréchale* herself commenced in

erful accents : " It is a long time since we saw each other last, Monsieur le Comte. Many things have happened since the battle of Jemappes."

" I am really glad to hear of the immense change in your own position," replied Neipperg, courteously. " You were then a vivandière, married, I believe, to a captain, and the captain is now a marshal of France, holding one of the highest commands under Napoleon. I beg you to accept my sincere congratulations, and to tender them in my name to your husband on your return to the camp."

" I did not recall old times, Monsieur le Comte, in order to be paid a few compliments on my husband's good promotion. . . . It was at the Château de Wendaal, on the night before Jemappes, that I aided Françoise de Laveline to escape from her father's tyrannical and a hateful union. What has become of her?"

" She is my wife," said Neipperg, half joyfully, half sorrowfully, as he recognized how deeply he was indebted for his happiness to this woman whose son he had denounced.

" I am glad—heartily glad," cried Catherine. " I owe everything to her, my benefactress, and I am glad to have repaid a little of my debt. But, unfortunately, I am again come as a petitioner."

The count, unable to offer her any hope, remained silent.

" Do you remember what it was that brought me within the Austrian lines on the occasion of our last meeting?" asked the *maréchalé*.

“ Not exactly.”

“ Whilst you were lying wounded in my laundry on the Tenth of August, I had made a solemn promise to Mademoiselle Blanche——”

“ Ah! I remember—I remember. You had promised to take our child to its mother at Jemappes. Do not attempt to probe that wound; it is far from healed, I assure you. Speak to me of the present, but do not speak of my poor lost boy.”

“ To speak of the one I must speak of the other.”

“ Why? The child was killed—cruelly abandoned in the burning castle by the wretch who had stolen it from your canteen.”

“ How do you know that? ”

“ I had it from his own lips as he lay groaning on his death-bed.”

“ But the child was taken from the ruins, and lives!”

“ My God—my God! is this true? ”

“ I, together with this brave fellow,” said Catherine, pointing to La Violette, “ took him from the ruins perfectly unhurt.”

“ And what became of him? ”

“ He has grown up into a fine, gallant young fellow—a brave French soldier; and,” added Catherine, dropping her voice, “ we gave him our name.”

Neipperg uttered a cry of fear and anguish as he fixed his gaze inquiringly upon the woman's face.

“ Monsieur de Neipperg,” continued the maréchale, slowly and solemnly, “ will you leave your son to die? ”



The consul sank into a chair, overwhelmed by grief and remorse.

"This is too terrible," he murmured; "to have found my child alive and saved by a miracle, only to be given up to death by me."

Placing her hand upon his shoulder, Catherine tried to rouse him from his lethargy.

"Come," she cried, "there is yet time; he must be saved."

"What can I do?"

"Go to the Prussian commander, and offer him in Lefebvre's name all the prisoners we have in the French camp in exchange for Henriot."

"It is useless; the sentence is pronounced, and will be carried out at daybreak."

He reflected for a few moments, and then exclaimed, "I think I have found a way; it is the last chance."

"And it is——?" asked Catherine.

"To claim the protection of the Austrian flag."

"How can you make an Austrian subject of a French officer?"

"He must renounce his commission, and follow the nationality of his father—which is but natural."

"I have great doubts about the success of your plan, for reasons of my own," said Catherine, somewhat scornfully; "but, as a father, it is your duty to try it."

Having received a pass from the consul that would carry La Violette and herself through the lines of combatants, Catherine lost no time in regaining the French camp, her further stay in Dantzic being not

only unnecessary, but dangerous. After laying a full account of her mission before Lefebvre, and receiving a mild scolding for concealing the truth of Henriot's parentage so long, the maréchale expressed her strong belief that the lad would never renounce the flag of his adopted country—a belief in which the old soldier heartily concurred.

A prey to conflicting emotions, he paced up and down his tent for some time in a fever of excitement. Suddenly he came to a halt, and cried, "Let the engineers say what they will—I'll do it! They may complain to the emperor if they like, when it's all over, but I'm going to give orders for the attack." Folding Catherine in his arms, he continued, "Don't be alarmed, wife; they shall not shoot our Henriot. I have Oudinot and his brave grenadiers with me; I will lead them to the charge, and, as I'm a living man, Dantzic shall be taken to-night!"

## CHAPTER XX.

## HENRIOT'S RESCUE.

WHILST Lefebvre was making preparations for the attack, the Comte de Neipperg was hastening to the place in which Marshal Kalkreuth, the Prussian commander, had taken up his quarters. Confiding to the latter the secret of the young French officer's parentage, he demanded his immediate surrender as an Austrian subject.

Prussia was at that moment very desirous of conciliating Austria. Although the latter power had remained neutral during the present campaign against France, it might at an opportune moment be induced to take up arms and help in crushing the Corsican empire. The presence of the Comte de Neipperg in Prussia at such a crisis was so significant, and the importance of maintaining cordial relations with him so great, that Marshal Kalkreuth did not hesitate to sacrifice discipline to policy, and ordered the French prisoner to be conducted to the Austrian consulate, where he was to remain until the claims put forward on his behalf had been examined.

On his arrival, Henriot was questioned at great length by Neipperg concerning the recollections of his earlier years, and especially as to what he knew of his parents. The young man's answers were frank and satisfactory. He had but very vague notions of what had preceded the happy years of camp-life during which he had been the pet of the regiment, and though he knew that he was but the adopted child of the good couple whose name he bore, he had never, thanks to their kind care, felt the want of either father or mother.

At length the consul, with difficulty repressing his emotion, said, "But your parents are nevertheless still living, and are anxious to take you to their arms. Do you feel no desire to see them?"

Henriot replied in a tone of some astonishment, tinged with indifference, "I can scarcely be expected to entertain any sentiments of affection for the parents who abandoned me in my infancy, and who have never troubled to make any inquiries concerning my existence."

"But you must not accuse them unjustly. Perhaps circumstances of which you know nothing may have caused them to abandon the search for their child. . . . As a matter of fact, for which I can vouch, they had every reason for believing you to be dead, and for a long time your supposed loss caused them unutterable grief. To-day they have heard that you still live, and, trembling with expectant joy, your mother is ready to fold you in her loving arms. Henriot, shall she wait in vain?"

The young officer could scarcely restrain his tears as he listened to the touching appeal of the consul. Though he had always given the sweet name of mother to the tender-hearted woman who had lavished such care upon him for so many years, a strange feeling of holy love and respect crept over him when he heard that he might hope to press the lips of her who had given him life. His voice trembled as he asked when he could see her.

"At once!" cried the count, his face beaming with joy, as he rushed into an adjoining room to prepare luncheon for the interview. The Countess de Neipperg, having heard Catherine's story from her husband in the morning, had with difficulty repressed her maternal feelings until the consul had questioned Henriot concerning his past, and a moment after the door was opened, mother and son, parted for so many years, were locked in a passionate embrace.

The young man's attitude towards his new-found father was less affectionate, though respectful, and seemed dictated by an instinct of defiance that was soon to be fully justified.

"I see," said the count, after the first ebullition of feeling had passed, "that you are still wearing the Austrian uniform that indirectly led to your happy discovery. It will be almost unnecessary to lay it aside, for I hope to get the consent of our sovereign to your retaining the same grade in the Austrian army that you held under Napoleon. I don't think there will be any difficulty, and in order to facilitate your release from the consequences of your escapade, I will

at once present you to Marshal Kalkreuth officially as an *attaché* in my staff."

The consul moved towards the door, but Henriot, deathly pale, budged not an inch.

"What is that you say, sir?" he cried. "Did I understand you aright? I am what I always have been—a French officer devoted to France and the emperor. Though I may have worn this disguise for a few hours, I discard it now for my own colours!" With these words, he tore off the white tunic and displayed the vest of a French hussar that he had worn under it.

"Henriot!" cried Neipperg. "What you are doing is madness! You are my son, and therefore an Austrian subject. I offer to maintain you in the rank that you held with the French, and promise you that your promotion will be rapid. Do not despise my proposal."

"If I did not I should be a coward!"

"Beware of your words, sir! You are speaking to your father!"

The countess threw herself between the two men, trying to calm their agitation.

"I fully understand Henriot's scruples," she said to her husband; "they are those of an honourable soldier. He has served France for many years; he cannot change his feelings in an hour, and it would be wrong on your part to force him to abjure his allegiance."

"Thank you, mother," said Henriot; "I can see that you do not wish your son to become a renegade

and a traitor. I am a Frenchman," he continued, in a louder tone, "and a Frenchman I mean to remain!"

"Fool!" cried Neipperg. "It means your death."

"I would rather die than be a traitor to my flag."

"I ask you for no treason," replied the count. "You made your way into this town in the uniform of a neutral officer; I implore you to preserve that character of neutrality. You are by birth an Austrian; therefore be reasonable, and let me act for you. Listen to your mother and to me; you are bound to us by ties of blood."

"I have no mother but France," cried Henriot, his voice trembling with passion, "and ties that are stronger than blood bind me to her. I made a mistake in coming into this town like a spy; I demand to be treated as such. At any rate, my comrades, when they hear of my death, will know that, if I went over to the enemy's lines, it was as a spy, and not as a deserter!"

At that moment the sound of heavy firing came from the direction of the ramparts, the repeated salvoes of artillery making the old house tremble to its foundations, while the shouts and yells of the combatants were wafted over on the air in the short intervals of the cannonade.

The firing ceased, and in the street below was heard the rush of a vast panic-stricken mob, that swept past as if anxious to gain the less exposed portions of the town, the women and children shrieking for aid as they were ruthlessly trampled down by the men whom terror had converted into brutes.

The Comte de Neipperg with his wife and son had flown to a window, and, throwing it open, peered out into the darkness, trying to learn the cause of the commotion; but although they were only some six feet above the roadway, the din was so great that they were unable to distinguish the confused cries that rent the air. The thinner the crowd became, the faster the fugitives of which it was composed scudded past, and none seemed inclined to stop and satisfy the curiosity of the citizens who looked on from the safe retreat of the Consulate.

The street was once more silent and deserted, the distant shouts of the departed mob alone breaking the stillness of the night, and indicating the route the poor wretches had taken. Coming from the opposite direction, however, was presently heard the regular beat of drums—a sound which, increasing in volume as it approached, seemed to be accompanied by the rapid tramp of a small body of soldiers. The hearts of the two men, who were still gazing anxiously from the window of the Consulate, beat faster and faster as they heard the troops advancing at the double through the darkness. Suddenly a torch that one of the soldiers had snatched from a canteen on the way illumined the head of the small column, and first and foremost ran La Violette, the brave drum-major, leading a detachment of Oudinot's grenadiers.

Henriot, wild with excitement, shouted from his post, "Vive Napoleon!" and back came an answering cheer from the men as, waving their bearskins on high, they cried, "Vive l'empereur!"



"This way!" roared their leader, seizing the window-ledge and vaulting into Neipperg's room, while six or seven of his comrades clambered up, less gracefully but not less quickly, to the rescue of their young officer. Believing Henriot to be still a prisoner, they levelled their guns at his white-coated gaoler; but La Violette, recognizing the count, immediately ordered them to lower their muskets. "No more bloodshed, my men," he cried. "Dantzic is taken, and the marshal has given special orders that we are not to lay a finger upon its brave defenders. . . . That was a grand idea of yours, colonel," added the drum-major, saluting his astonished superior. "It was all through you that the attack was made a fortnight earlier than the rascally engineers had intended. But it's over now; Marshal Kalkreuth has capitulated, and the town is ours!"

The capture of Dantzic was, indeed, an accomplished fact. The reinforcements which Lefebvre had been anxiously expecting had at length arrived, and feeling himself well supported by men of such experience and renowned bravery as Mortier, Oudinot, and Lannes, the marshal, during Catherine's absence from the camp, had been meditating upon the advisability of striking the decisive blow at once. By ignoring the remonstrances of the engineers, he would not only in all probability capture the town, but certainly manage to save his godson's life; he therefore resolved to act on his own responsibility. As we have seen, the news that the *maréchale* brought back from Dantzic had but served to strengthen him

in his determination, and he gave orders that the attack was to be made without further delay.

It was eight o'clock in the evening when four columns, each consisting of four thousand men, marched down into the dry ditch that surrounded the town and took up a position at the foot of a formidable slope. This slope was crossed in every direction by a number of stockades, firmly driven into the ground, and offering immense difficulties to the advance of an attacking force. In addition to these obstacles, three enormous beams had been suspended by ropes at the summit of the slope, and these, when cut loose by the besieged, would by their fall effectually check even the fiercest onslaught. A volunteer was demanded in the French ranks to make the ascent, and see whether these simple but terrible engines of war could not be released at once.

La Violette, advancing towards the general commanding the sappers, asked for the honour in tones of great modesty.

"No doubt, sir, there are many brave fellows here who deserve it more than I do, but I offer to go because I think I might reach the ropes without the aid of a ladder, and, seeing me alone, and almost unarmed, the Prussians will be unable to guess my intentions." With these words the drum-major drew himself up to his full height to convince the general of his fitness for the task, and in a few soul-stirring words received permission to ascend the slope.

Creeping up on all fours with cat-like agility, La Violette managed to escape the attention of the

Prussian sentries in the darkening twilight until he had reached the beams; then drawing his sword, he slashed away like a madman at the ropes, until the enormous weights attached to them went crashing down into the ditch.

Almost simultaneously with their fall, Lefebvre shouted to his men in a voice of thunder, "Forward—*mes braves!* Dantzic is ours!"

Like the rush of a mighty torrent that nothing can stem, Oudinot's grenadiers went up that slope brandishing their muskets and yelling defiance to the foe that had withstood them so long. Not a shot was fired during the wild ascent, but when the first column had reached the summit it paused, and poured a deadly volley into the ranks of the terrified Prussians. The cannon on the ramparts opened fire upon the assailants at short range, but nothing could now stop the advance of the victorious French.

Marshal Kalkreuth, seeing that resistance was impossible, at once expressed his desire to capitulate, and the heavy firing on both sides was stopped. It was while the conditions of the surrender were being discussed that La Violette, at the head of a small body of his own regiment, had ventured into the interior of the city, bent upon obeying Catherine's commands to bring back her Henriot safe and sound.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## THE MISSION REWARDED.

THE news of the capture of the great staple town of the north was intensely gratifying to Napoleon, and he resolved to visit the place at once in order to become personally acquainted with its defences and the nature of its resources. Quitting his quarters at Finckenstein, he arrived before Dantzic, where he found the greater part of the French army still encamped outside the walls of the city, the terms of the capitulation not yet being entirely agreed upon.

Having congratulated Marshal Lefebvre and complimented the troops drawn up to receive him, the emperor had retired to consider the conditions of the surrender, when Rapp informed him that the Maréchale Lefebvre demanded the honour of an audience.

"What the deuce is the maréchale doing here?" he cried in surprise. "We know that she is very much attached to her husband, and that she sets all wives an excellent example, but that is no reason why she should come and watch the marshal in the camp itself. The proper place for the wives of my generals is at the court, with the empress, and that

of their husbands is in the trenches, among their troops."

The emperor stopped and smiled, and then muttered to himself, "It is true that, if I had given Josephine her way, she would be here now. In her last letter she expressed an intense desire to see the fair land of Poland, though I rather fancy it was the dark beauties of Poland she meant. Can she have sent Madame Lefebvre to watch me? We'll see; if so, I think I can frighten the lady away. . . . Rapp, send in Madame la Maréchale."

Catherine, in spite of the appellation that had always stuck to her, was never quite at her ease in the presence of the emperor. He had such a terrible way of looking at people, and his gaze seemed to penetrate to one's very soul. Besides, he was not always very gallant, nor even polite, towards women. Nearly all the southern races of Europe entertain a kind of secret contempt for their women, but conceal this hereditary trait under a gilding of conventional forms. Napoleon neglected the gilding.

Many stories have been handed down of remarkable outbursts that escaped him both in the court ceremonies and at more private assemblies. That the brutality of these was sometimes perfectly justifiable is well instanced by his famous reply to Madame de Staël. That insupportable bluestocking had one day put to him the following question, flattering herself, perhaps, with the hope of wresting a compliment from the ungallant emperor—

"Sire, what sort of woman do you admire most?"

"The one who bears her husband most children," replied Napoleon, turning on his heel, and leaving the insufferable prig to ponder upon the danger of fishing for compliments.

Catherine had frequently heard the merciless repartees that escaped the emperor when irritated by the too direct solicitations of the court ladies, many of whom, like Madame de Rémusat, afterwards took their revenge with the pen for the refusal to dishonour them of which Napoleon had been guilty. She had nothing of that sort to fear for herself, but she was exceedingly diffident concerning the success of the mission with which she was charged.

Fortunately she found Napoleon in a good humour. The capture of Dantzic had put him in excellent spirits, and though he could not help manifesting his surprise at Catherine's journey across Europe, he received the wife of his brave Lefebvre with every mark of consideration. The *maréchale* opened her mission with extreme caution. She commenced by speaking of the anxiety that the empress felt concerning the health of her august consort, and of her desire to have definite news of him by a trusty messenger. Then she came to the first important point: in sympathetic accents she announced the sad news of the death of Napoleon Charles, the child of Hortense.

A sob escaped from the emperor's breast as he heard the unexpected and unwelcome tidings. He had become attached to the child—he loved it. The pitiless conqueror, who butchered men by the thousand, and laid whole continents waste, always had a

tender corner in his heart for children. How often "Uncle Bibiche," as the child called him, had been found by his courtiers and statesmen romping about the nursery when they believed him absorbed in some vital State problem! He would even go so far as to have the boy placed upon the table while he was at dinner, and allow him to scramble about amongst the plates, or dig his little feet into the various dishes; while in his study he would break off in the midst of the most important plans, or interrupt the instructions he was dictating to his secretaries, to go down on all fours and let the child ride on his back.

There was no doubt that it was his intention to adopt the boy. He well knew that certain scurrilous writers had charged him with being the child's father, and with having married his step-daughter Hortense to his brother Louis in order to get out of the difficulty; but he took no pains to contradict these reports. On the contrary, he helped to spread them, believing that the nation would be more ready to transmit the imperial power to one who was known to be a child of its idolized emperor.

The news of the boy's death destroyed all his projects, and for a moment the blow seemed to have stunned him. Catherine saw before her a double grief, for the heart of, my man was as much touched by the loss of the child as loved as his mind was unhinged by the success of a weary and of a carefully prepared policy. I am curious

At last Napoleon of this child." and mastering his

emotion, asked, "What other news have you, Madame la Maréchale?"

"Sire," replied Catherine, "grief and joy are ever treading on each other's heels in this life, and births and deaths follow on in rapid alternation. My message is not of death alone; I have news which will possibly lessen, though it cannot dissipate, your grief. . . . It may interest you to hear that a certain lady attached to the court of Queen Caroline has become a mother——"

"Do you mean Eleonore?" cried Napoleon, starting up. "Has she a child—a boy?"

"Yes, sire, a son, who has received the name of Leon."

"Are you quite certain that what you allege is true?"

"Perfectly, sire; I have seen the child, and he is the image of your Majesty," replied Catherine, boldly.

The emperor fixed his gaze upon her, but it was not in anger.

"You fully deserve the name that has been given you, Madame Sans-Gêne!" he cried; then, turning on his heel, he paced to and fro for some time, muttering broken phrases that betrayed the direction of his thoughts.

"I have a son. . . . The child is mine—no doubt of that! This gives the lie to ~~em~~ the absurd rumours of the Beauharnais and the ~~J~~unwantes. . . . Ha, ha! my clever doctors; who ~~;~~ the child now? We will see whether my dynasty ~~o~~ butchere~~d~~ be perpetuated; and perhaps the future continents ~~ver~~ all! . . . Madame



la Maréchale, I thank you for your good news, and as soon as your brave husband has made his triumphal entry into Dantzic I hope to give you both your reward." With a wave of the hand, indicating that the interview was over, he added, "You hold the secret of Napoleon; take care that you do not betray it!"

"Sire," replied Catherine, showing no inclination to leave the emperor's presence, "I also hold that of the empress, and her Majesty has commanded me to confide it to you."

"Oh, indeed! Some fresh bill, I suppose, that she is unable to pay! The money that woman wastes every year in frills and furbelows would raise a fresh legion, complete the canal to Bordeaux, or open the road to Mayence. Well, since you are her Majesty's ambassadress, you ought not to be so shy; out with the amount!"

"This is not a question of money, sire. The empress, on hearing of the birth of this child——"

"Who was foolish enough to tell her that?" cried the emperor.

"Your Majesty has many enemies, even among those who pretend to be your best friends."

"Yes, I know. My wife has my sisters against her; Elisa and Caroline hate her, I believe. . . . Ah! Madame la Maréchale, my two families give me more trouble than all the kings of Europe put together," said Napoleon, with a weary sigh. "And what did the empress say? I am curious to know what she thought of the birth of this child."

“The empress desires to have your Majesty’s permission to adopt it as her own.”

With his habitual perspicacity and rapidity of thought, Napoleon immediately grasped the full purport of this request. The empress, influenced no doubt by her own family, and perhaps even by the Bonapartes themselves, sought to profit by the despair into which she knew the death of his nephew would plunge him, and had hit upon this plan of adoption as a means of preserving her own authority and her husband’s love.

“I see the move,” he cried. “They wish the child to become my heir! The idea is not a bad one; but what would the kings of Europe say to the rights of this bastard? If it is possible for me to be a father, would it not be better if Napoleon II. were legitimate, and born of the daughter of some reigning family?” He stopped, fearing to have gone too far, and casting a suspicious glance towards Catherine, continued, “Madame la Maréchale, your mission is ended. I will reply to the empress’s proposal as soon as I have thought the matter out. You may carry back to her Majesty the expression of my unabated love, and the assurance that I continue in perfectly good health.”

This time Napoleon’s valedictory wave of the hand was so unmistakable that Catherine rose, and with a deep obeisance left the imperial presence, carrying with her the secret that was to modify the emperor’s whole policy and change the tenor of his life. From the few words dropped by him, the maréchale was

convinced that he looked forward to having a rightful heir born of royal blood; the idea of divorce, long dormant, was once more awakened in the fertile brain of the modern Charlemagne by the birth of Eleonore's child.

\* \* \* \* \*

Marshal Lefebvre made his triumphal entry into the town of Dantzic on the 26th of May, 1807. He had invited his two colleagues, Lannes and Mortier, to share the honours of triumph with him, but they refused to accept any part of the laurels to which they declared him to have the sole right, and contented themselves with taking their places in the brilliant staff that rode into the town behind their glorious chief.

Two days after this event, the emperor, who had meanwhile returned to the camp at Finckenstein, once more paid a visit to Dantzic, in order to preside at a banquet, to which all the French officers and many of the chief dignitaries of Dantzic had been invited.

The emperor, on his arrival, instead of at once leading the way to the tables, took his seat upon a specially prepared throne, and gathered his marshals and generals around him. Duroc, Grand Marshal of France, hereupon made his appearance, carrying a dainty sword, the hilt of which was richly studded with diamonds, while an officer accompanied him, bearing a red velvet cushion on which lay a small golden crown. A peculiar smile flitted over the emperor's features as the two officers advanced towards

him with these insignia, and rising from his seat, he beckoned Lefebvre to his side with a majestic wave of the bâton he held.

Lefebvre advanced a few steps nearer his imperial master, thinking that it was merely the intention of the latter to address a few compliments to him upon the happy termination of the siege; but Napoleon, seeing his hesitation, turned to Duroc.

“Grand Marshal, invite his Grace the Duke of Dantzic to kneel before us to receive his investiture.”

Lefebvre, on hearing this unfamiliar title, expected to see some Prussian functionary or other come forward, for amongst the French there were neither dukes nor dukedoms. But Duroc soon made him comprehend that it was he who was required to kneel upon the red velvet cushion, and as he tremblingly did so, Napoleon placed the crown upon his head. Even then he scarcely understood the extent of the dignity that was being conferred upon him, until the emperor, taking the sword and giving him three light taps on the shoulder, pronounced the following formula with all the gravity of an officiating bishop—

“In the name of the empire, by the grace of God and the will of the people, I create you, Lefebvre, Duke of Dantzic, to possess and enjoy all the rights and privileges attaching to that dignity.” In a less solemn tone he added, “Rise, Monsieur le Duc, and embrace your emperor!”

While the soldiers placed under the windows of the palace fired a salute in honour of the new duke, the marshals, generals, and other officers present pressed

round their old comrade to congratulate him upon his good fortune.

The bestowal of such a high title upon a soldier who had risen from the ranks was a political act of immense importance, especially since all such titles had been abolished by the Revolution. But Napoleon wished to consolidate his throne and his dynasty by the aid of a new aristocracy. He had in vain tried to coax the old nobility to his court by the offer of honourable posts and lucrative employment, by advantageous marriages, and even by bribery. Since his efforts had failed in that direction, he determined to create an aristocracy of his own, based, like that of the Crusades, on military glory; he intended that the new order of nobles, their names made illustrious by a score of victories, should in time, thanks to their titles and their wealth, become united to the descendants of the old families of France. Thus would the union of the two great parties in France be cemented, and the work of his dynasty be accomplished.

To this idea were, in a manner, joined his vague projects of a divorce and an alliance for himself with some reigning family. He wished to build up a society of degrees—an immense pyramid at the summit of which he, the emperor, should sit in solitary grandeur. Immediately beneath him his brothers, the reigning Kings of Holland, Spain, and Westphalia, together with Murat, King of Naples, and Eugene, Viceroy of Italy. Then would come the great heroes of war; princes, such as Ney and Berthier; dukes, such as Lefebvre, Augereau, and Soult; counts and

barons, administrators and diplomats; and lastly, the simple knights, whose order he had created in the camp at Boulogne.

By the skilful construction of this great framework he hoped to restore society to its earlier feudal form, and to recast the revolutionary mass in the mould of ancient France.

Having then decided upon the creation of a new nobility, his first choice had fallen upon Lefebvre. At a time when even the most illustrious generals were known to be arrant thieves, the well-known heroism and unimpeachable probity of the marshal made him peculiarly fitted for this distinction, and the capture of Dantzic furnished a ready pretext. It was really because he was the son of a peasant, and because he had commenced life as a private in the Guards, that the emperor chose Lefebvre as the prototype of the new nobility. Every man in the army would feel stimulated to further deeds of heroism and devotion when it was seen that a comrade who had risen from the ranks occupied one of the first places not only in the service, but also amongst the nobility of his country.

Lefebvre was seated at the emperor's right hand during the banquet, and though deeply moved by the kind words of his fellow-officers and the honour bestowed upon him, he could not help laughing at some of the honest jokes cracked by his old comrades at his and Catherine's expense. Opposite him was seated a young officer belonging to one of the first families of France, and as the merry jests went round, the

marshal thought he detected a satirical smile upon the aristocrat's lips.

Leaning forward, he remarked in tones loud enough for all to hear, "You seem to be amused, sir, because I have been given a title that I have earned, though you are proud to wear that which is yours by an accident of birth. Each of us has evidently his own idea of glory. *You* are a descendant, *I* am an ancestor!"

## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE DIVORCE.

JOSEPHINE had for some time been preparing herself for the terrible blow that was now imminent. Though she had obtained from Cardinal Fesch a certificate of her marriage before the Church, she relied more upon the true affection that Napoleon bore her than upon legal documents or titles to retain her place by his side. When, therefore, Cambacérès, the chancellor, presented himself before her one dull November afternoon, and with faltering lips expressed the emperor's desire to confer with her upon matters of grave moment, she guessed the purport of the interview, and went to meet Napoleon with an almost calm demeanour.

The scene between husband and wife was short but heartrending.

Napoleon informed Josephine, in terms as brief as possible, of the decisive step he was about to take, explaining how necessary it was for reasons of State that he should have an heir, and how grieved he was that the curse of sterility should have come to mar their happiness.



As the empress stammered out a few words in reply, evoking tender recollections calculated rather to play upon the emperor's feelings than to combat his arguments, he stopped her with his harsh, pitiless phrases.

"I warn you that all your efforts to shake my resolution will be useless. My mind is fully made up. I love you as tenderly as ever, but the good of the State tears us asunder. Policy does not appeal to the heart—only to the head!"

On hearing her doom Josephine had fallen into hysterics, and the emperor, opening the door of the apartment, immediately summoned M. de Bausset, one of the chamberlains, to his assistance.

The empress lay stretched upon the floor, uttering piercing shrieks and incoherent lamentations.

"Are you strong enough to lift her Majesty and to carry her to her room?" asked Napoleon. "Come, I will help you." And together they lifted the inert woman.

On arriving at the head of the small staircase that communicated with the empress's apartments, M. de Bausset took the almost lifeless body upon his own shoulder, whilst the emperor, with a lighted candle in his hand, led the way. But soon the chamberlain was obliged to admit his inability to descend the narrow staircase with such a burden, and summoned one of his colleagues. The emperor then handed the candle to the new-comer, and himself assisted Bausset by taking the empress's feet and descending the stairs backwards. According to the testimony of the two

chamberlains, he was more deeply moved at the end of this terrible interview than he was ever known to be before or after.

The decree annulling the marriage was signed before a fortnight had passed, and was read at a family meeting that took place one evening at the Tuileries.

Napoleon, taking Josephine by the hand, read a speech prepared by Cambacères, in which he announced the resolution arrived at in unison with his dear consort, alleging, as the sole motive of the divorce, the futility of still hoping for children by the empress.

“God alone knows,” ran the document, “what pain it has cost me to make this resolution, but there is no sacrifice too great for me to undertake when once I am convinced that it is for the good of the empire.

“It is my duty to add that, far from ever having had reason for complaint, I have, on the contrary, nothing but praise for the attachment and affection always shown by my well-beloved spouse. For fifteen years she has made my life supremely happy, and the recollection of those years will ever be engraved upon my heart.”

Josephine was to have read a reply to this declaration, but speech failed her at the last moment, and passing the paper to one of the chamberlains, she begged him to read it for her.

She declared that, recognizing the impossibility of bearing the emperor an heir, she submitted to the

divorce with resignation. "But the dissolution of my marriage will not affect the feelings that animate my heart; the emperor will always find in me a true friend. I alone know what pain it has cost him to take a step dictated by such great interests of State, but both of us are proud of the sacrifice we have made for the welfare of our country."

To these phrases, composed by Cambacérès or Maret, Josephine had added a couple of lines of her own, touching in their simplicity. "I am happy to lay at the emperor's feet the greatest proof of affection and devotion ever given on this earth."

Josephine's attitude during this terrible crisis in her life effaces a good deal of her earlier guilt, and posterity will always be indulgent to the victim who was sacrificed on the altar of Napoleon's ambition.

On the day after this family meeting the Senate held a sitting to give its consent to the divorce, and here the more prosaic details were discussed.

It was stipulated that Josephine was to retain the rank and title of empress, and that an annual income of two million francs was to be paid her by the State. Many legal quibbles were raised concerning the validity of the divorce, but of what avail were the objections of these conscientious senators against the wish of the mighty emperor?

At four o'clock on the same day, immediately after the decree had been confirmed, the carriage that was to convey Josephine from the Tuileries to Malmaison drew up in the court-yard of the palace. The heavens were dull and murky, and the roads along which the

empress travelled lay shrouded in a thick damp mist that was well suited to the weary traveller's state of mind. How often had she driven gaily along this same route in all the glory of power and in sovereign state!

The emperor had quitted the Tuileries for Trianon previous to Josephine's departure, but two days later he came to see her at Malmaison. He addressed her in gentle tones, and appeared very uneasy about the condition in which he found her.

"You seem to me much weaker than you should be. You have shown great courage, and must summon up a little more to sustain your drooping health. Take great care of yourself, and mind you get plenty of sleep. Remember that it will always make me happy to know that you are so." And with a tender embrace he left her to return to Trianon.

Again a few days passed, and then there was a solemn farewell dinner, more like a funeral banquet, given at Trianon on Christmas Day. The details of that final scene were never known, but it is not difficult to imagine how heartrending must have been the parting of two who had loved, and still loved, each other so tenderly. In spite of Josephine's faults and Napoleon's occasional lapses from conjugal fidelity, their domestic life had been a happy one. The emperor, it is true, never showed any signs of regret in later years for the step he had taken, though his pride may have caused him to conceal any such feelings even if he had them. But in the days of his terrible solitude on the rock of Saint Helena, the vision of so

many happy years spent with Josephine must undoubtedly have risen up before him in hideous contrast with the few chequered and troublous ones passed at the side of Marie Louise.

Napoleon, however, was throughout his life moved by a mysterious and irresistible force. Like a traveller rushing down a mountain-side, he was impelled to go on till he reached the bottom, bruised and broken by his fall. As soon as Josephine had been buried alive at Malmaison, the preparations for the second marriage were immediately hurried on.

The emperor was informed by his political advisers that if he addressed himself to the court of Austria, his proposals would in all probability be entertained. The head of the house of Hapsburg feared a speedy dismemberment of his empire unless he threw the greedy conqueror a sop in the shape of his daughter; and the union that had been mooted to him had, moreover, filled the brain of Francis II. with dreams scarcely less ambitious than those of Napoleon himself. By this alliance, two monarchies would in future govern the world and preserve its equilibrium. Austria would lend revolutionary France that moral support which Napoleon had vainly sought to obtain from Russia, and a princess of the same house as the ill-fated Marie Antoinette might not only revive with *éclat* the glories of the *ancien régime* in the Tuileries, but unite the divided factions of the French nation itself.

Having convinced himself of the immense advantages to be gained from an alliance with the victor of

Austerlitz, Francis determined to lose no time, and throwing conventionality to the winds, made overtures to Napoleon whilst the latter was still hesitating between the choice of a Russian or an Austrian wife.

Early in the year 1810 the official demand for the hand of Marie Louise, written in Napoleon's illegible hieroglyphics, was presented to Francis II. by Berthier Prince of Neuchatel, who had received orders from his imperial master to spare no expense in making the special embassy with which he was charged as brilliant an affair as possible.

It was wonderful to note the change that came over Napoleon as soon as the marriage had been definitely arranged, and the Corsican *parvenu* could rely with certainty upon becoming the son-in-law of a real royal monarch. He examined himself several times a day with minute care, throwing back his shoulders, thumping his chest, and cracking each joint in his body to test its solidity and fitness.

At this period of his career the emperor was no longer the lean, cadaverous-looking object of his earlier years. His cheeks were well filled out, and his whole appearance reminded one rather of a fat Italian prelate than of an active soldier devoured by ambition. His height was a little over five feet two, the popular fallacy that he was a very short man being no doubt due to the fact that he was always surrounded by such giants as Berthier, Lefebvre, Ney, Mortier, and others. His hair, which had never been very abundant, was beginning to suffer from the ravages of time; and his forehead, naturally a high

one, seemed to be daily growing in extent. His piercing glance had lost none of its power, striking every one who came within its range as one of the most remarkable attributes of this remarkable man.

His health was excellent, and his constitution an exceptionally strong one. He found repose in labour, and was endowed with an extraordinary capacity for work. His followers had never known him to show signs of fatigue, and after passing hours in the saddle, he would dismount from his horse and immediately sit down to an examination of the accounts and reports that were always awaiting his inspection. There was not a detail that escaped his scrutiny, and he recognized the importance of proving to his subordinates that his great mind could, and frequently did, stoop to grapple with the smallest matters. This is testified by the following note made in his own handwriting on the margin of a report still extant: "Why has no mention been made of the two four-pounders on the wharf at Ostend?" He had seen these two cannon, and remembered them while wading through a huge inventory of all the available artillery of his vast empire. By details such as these will be understood how clear was his mind on all State affairs at the moment when thoughts of his marriage with Marie Louise began to possess him.

The first modification that the approaching event brought about in his personal habits was the unwonted care he now bestowed upon dress. He had scarcely ever been known to wear any other clothes than his colonel's uniform, but now the tailor who

made Murat's gorgeous coats received orders to measure the emperor for a magnificent gold-embroidered costume, which, however, when completed, was flung aside, or rather given away to his brother-in-law, the King of Naples. He who had never worn anything but the easy-fitting cavalry topboots, now pinched his feet in a dainty pair of shoes made by a ladies' bootmaker, and took lessons in waltzing from the incomparable Despréaux. It was his intention to dance with Marie Louise at the first State ball given after their marriage, and he knew that all German women doted on waltzing.

Meanwhile the Tuileries was being turned upside down by an army of upholsterers and decorators, nothing that might remind the new empress of Napoleon's first wife being allowed to remain. The emperor himself marched about the palace with a preoccupied air, superintending the workmen and giving them their orders. Frequently he would stop before the life-size portraits of Louis XIV. and Marie Antoinette which adorned the bedchamber of his future bride, and with a self-satisfied smile he would murmur, "The king, my uncle; my aunt, the queen!"

One day, when he had been particularly pleased by his tour of inspection, he met Lefebvre in one of the corridors. "Come with me, Monsieur le Duc," he cried; "I want to show you something, and to talk to you."

"Bah!" thought the marshal. "He's going to stuff me up with some more praises of his Austrian woman. . . She's perfection—the eighth wonder of



the world! I wish he'd get somebody else for those confidences!"

Lefebvre had been much grieved by Josephine's departure, and looked upon divorce as a kind of desertion. When two had commenced the battle of life together, he said, it was sheer cowardice to part when it was only half won.

The emperor led the way through the grand drawing-room, the walls of which were being hung with rich tapestries, and up to the apartments that were being prepared for Marie Louise. "I want to show you the empress's trousseau," he said; and although Marshal Lefebvre was more competent to give an opinion upon the contents of a soldier's knapsack than upon the heaps of dainty finery that covered the bed and every other available article of furniture in the room, he was obliged to listen with a good grace while Napoleon enumerated the use and value of the more important pieces of attire.

The cost of the linen and laces alone amounted to no less than two hundred thousand francs, and there were dresses to the value of one hundred and twenty-six thousand francs. Amongst the jewels that had been purchased by Napoleon as gifts for his wife was a portrait of himself set in diamonds, costing six hundred thousand francs, a necklace costing nearly a million, and pendants and earrings to match. But even all this was put into the shade by the string of diamonds that had been purchased by the State for the new empress, and which was worth considerably more than three millions.

After showing Lefebvre these magnificent gifts, Napoleon observed with a smile, "If she is a woman, the empress should be happy—eh, my boy?"

"Yes, sire, especially as her Highness is said to live in no great state at her father's court. Her jewels are, I hear, extremely simple, and all her dresses put together are probably worth less than one of these frills. She ought to be a happy woman, as you say; but were I in her place, all these diamonds and laces would be as nothing compared with the glory of being the wife of Napoleon."

"Flatterer!" cried the emperor, pinching the marshal's ear.

"I say what I think, sire, just like my wife, who has the name for it."

"Ah! by-the-by, I want to talk to you about your wife, confidentially. You must dine with me first, though; come along!" And drawing his arm through that of Lefebvre, he dragged the somewhat unwilling marshal with him.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## LEFEBVRE OBSTINATE.

THE emperor's table had been laid in a small dining-room, which he preferred to the more palatial apartments. Since Josephine's departure, he seldom invited more than one guest at a time, generally Duroc, Rapp, or some minister who had come to consult him on matters of State.

Napoleon was never much given to the pleasures of the table. He ate very quickly, and considered every meal a disagreeable task to be got over as soon as possible, scarcely ever remaining at table longer than a quarter of an hour, even at a State dinner. He would rise from his chair immediately he had finished eating, and, motioning his guests to keep their seats, would be off to his work. The dinner was always excellent, for, though no gourmand himself, Napoleon took care that his table should be well served. All his marshals were blessed with good appetites, and Cambacérès, the chancellor, afforded his imperial master intense pleasure by the swiftness with which he devoured immense quantities of food.

Though the invitations were nearly always given

at very short notice, many of the courtiers took the precaution to dine in private before sitting down with the emperor, in order that they might rise with him. Frequent mention has been made of the fact that Napoleon ate in a very unmannerly fashion. He would often, in a fit of abstraction, drop his knife and fork and use his fingers; and whenever one of his favourite dishes was placed before him, he would dip his bread into the gravy and then pass the dish on to his neighbour. This would frequently happen, too, when the table was lined with the highest dignitaries and their wives, and few of these noble guests would refuse to be served from the dish in which the emperor had dabbled his fingers. Napoleon's favourite dishes were *poulet à la Marengo*, which reminded him of one of his most brilliant victories, and after that knuckle of veal stewed together with such peasant fare as lentils and haricots.

The dinner to which Lefebvre found himself unexpectedly invited was served in a simple fashion, but consisted of a greater number of courses than usual. Napoleon was trying to get into the habit of remaining at table somewhat longer than was his wont. It was a fresh sacrifice that he was making for the sake of his future wife.

"The Germans have big appetites, and are accustomed to long dinners; I must get used to it!" he said.

Lefebvre, who was a hearty eater, was not sorry to find the emperor contracting such good habits, but he was somewhat ill at ease concerning Napoleon's allusion to his wife; it spoilt his appetite.

When the dinner was at length over, and coffee was being served, the emperor turned to the trusty old soldier with the following question: "Tell me, Lefebvre; what is the private opinion of the army concerning my rupture with Josephine? I dare say you talk about it among yourselves. I should like to know what is really being said, especially about my new marriage."

"Sire, we have no other opinions but those of your Majesty, and the army is, as ever, entirely obedient to your will. We are not in the habit of discussing your orders, and we look upon the whole business of the divorce and the new marriage as a change of front—a manoeuvre that you have deemed it prudent to make. It is not for us to raise objections—openly, at least."

"Ah! but secretly, eh? Now, just tell me what is said at the mess-tables; that is what I wish to know."

"H'm! what we say is neither very important nor of great interest," replied Lefebvre, hesitatingly. "To tell you the truth, sire, we are all extremely sorry for the empress. She was good and kind, and always had a pleasant word and a smile for every one. We had got accustomed to her, you see, and no doubt she had become accustomed to our rough ways too. Her good fortune had increased with ours, and she would never have dreamt of reproaching us with our humble origin or with our lack of fine manners. I know the things that are said about us, and especially about me and my good wife, in the households of the Queen of Naples and the Grand Duchess Elisa, but the empress never tolerated such talk in her own presence."

“You must not exaggerate the importance of the meaningless but untimely jokes of my sisters. I will let them know that it displeases me to see the brave men ridiculed who have helped me to win my battles, and to establish that throne which my family foolishly looks upon as almost its own by right of inheritance.”

“The Empress Josephine, as I said before, sire, would never tolerate such pleasantries, and always treated us with respect. We fear that a new sovereign, a princess reared on the steps of a throne and amid the flattery of a proud aristocracy, will look down upon us with her innate caste prejudices; we are afraid that our modest extraction may offend the sensibility of this *grande dame*. That, sire, is the true expression of the feelings of your marshals and generals, none of whom, as your Majesty knows, can boast of other arms than those they bore for France upon the field of battle.”

“You and your brave comrades, Lefebvre, may rest assured that Marie Louise will not despise the virtues of such heroes as yourself, Ney, Oudinot, Soult, and a host of others. Your scars are your armorial bearings, and your escutcheons are not adorned with the chimerical and fantastic scrawls of venial heralds, but with the towns you have taken, the citadels you have stormed, the standards and the thrones that have fallen into your hands. Marie Louise must be taught this modern and revised heraldry, and will know how to respect it.”

“But we are not alone,” remarked Lefebvre; “there are our wives.”

Napoleon made a gesture of impatience. "Yes, I understand. Your damnation wives have gained no battles—that is what you mean."

"Sire, they have shared our existence, stimulated our energies by their love, and inspired us to fresh efforts by their admiration. They are excellent wives, who deserve the good fortune that your Majesty and our victories have brought them."

"Yes, yes, I know," muttered the emperor. "But some of these exemplary wives, to whose virtues I am quite disposed to do homage, make most extraordinary ladies. . . . Why the deuce were you all in such a hurry to marry when you were only sergeants?"

"Sire, it may have been a mistake, but I have never repented it."

"Yours is a brave and loyal heart, Lefebvre, and I have as much admiration for your words as for your deeds; but you must allow that now, when you are a marshal of France, a grand officer of the crown and Duke of Dantzic, your wife—your excellent wife—is a little out of place. Her manners, as you yourself admit, make her the laughing-stock of the court, and her language is too frequently suggestive of the washtub."

"Madame Lefebvre, sire, loves me and I love her in return, and nothing that she says or does to the disgust of the fine court ladies will make me forget the periods of happiness that we passed together."

"It's a great pity though, Lefebvre, that you married during the Revolution!"

"It is done, sire, and cannot be undone."

“ You think not ? ” said Napoleon, fixing a piercing glance upon the marshal.

Lefebvre started as he caught the emperor’s meaning, and without stopping to weigh his words, he burst out, “ Catherine and I are married, sire, for life.”

“ But,” retorted Napoleon, “ I was married too, and yet—— ”

“ With you, sire, it is different.”

“ Possibly ; but really, have you never thought of divorce, Lefebvre ? ”

“ Never, sire,” cried the marshal. “ I look upon divorce as—— ”

He stopped, fearing to let anything escape him which might appear to be a reflection upon the emperor’s conduct.

“ Listen, Lefebvre,” said Napoleon, observing the faithful soldier’s embarrassment ; “ if you can see your way to a divorce by common consent, I will settle a substantial income upon the maréchale, confirm her title of duchess, and assure her all the respect and honour to which her rank entitles her.”

The marshal had risen, and stood leaning against the chimney-piece, listening with a pale face and knitted brows to the unwelcome proposals of the emperor.

The latter, his hands clasped behind his back, paced up and down the room, as was his wont when working out the details of some battle or matter of State policy.

“ As soon as the decree of divorce has been pronounced,” he went on, “ I will find you a wife—the



daughter or widow of some aristocrat of the old *régime*; a woman with a title, a name and ancestors of her own. Her fortune will be a minor consideration—I will give you money enough for both. . . . The young nobility must be mixed with the old. You are the modern paladins, and must take for wives the daughters of the heroes of the Crusades. This fusion of the new aristocracy of France with the old is the only means by which we can establish the new order of regenerated society and secure peace for our empire. There will thus be an end to antagonism and rivalry. Your sons will be on a par with the scions of the noblest houses of Europe, and in two generations all traces and recollections of the division and hostility now existing in France will have disappeared. The French nation will then, and then only, be ‘one and indivisible.’ . . . You must get a divorce, Lefebvre, and I’ll make it my business to provide you with a wife!”

“Sire, you may send me to the furthestmost limits of the earth, to the burning desert of Africa, or to the glacial steppes of the North—you may dispose of me in any and every way that you please—you may even order me to kill myself, and I will cheerfully obey you. It is in your power to strip me of the rank and the titles conferred on me by your good pleasure; but there is one thing that you cannot do! You cannot force me to renounce the love of an honest woman, nor oblige me to tear myself from her who was my companion in darker days, and who will remain my wife till death. Sire, I beg you to understand that

even should I incur your displeasure by my disobedience, I am determined to have no divorce, and Madame Lefebvre, maréchale and duchess by your good will, shall remain Madame Lefebvre by mine!" With these words the Duke of Dantzic dared for the first time to defy his emperor and resist his commands.

"You are a brave fellow—a model husband, Monsieur le Duc de Dantzic," replied Napoleon, coldly. "I do not agree with your sentiments, but I will respect your scruples. You shall see that I am no tyrant, and we will drop the idea of your divorce. Keep this excellent wife of yours, but tell her to put a little more restraint upon her tongue, and not to offend the ears of an empress reared at the court of Vienna with the language of the market-place. . . . You may leave me now, Monsieur le Duc—I have work to do. Go and seek the companionship of your excellent housewife!"

Lefebvre bowed and left the imperial presence, much perturbed in mind by the proposition that had been made to him, and deeply wounded by Napoleon's parting words.

The emperor looked after him from the window as he slowly descended the steps of the palace, and, shrugging his shoulders, summed up in one word his opinion of the marshal's resistance to the matrimonial proposals he had laid before him.

"Fool!"

The comparative harmlessness of this last shot might have reassured Lefebvre if it could have reached him as he slowly wended his way home,

pondering on the moral victory he had gained over Napoleon, and the results to which it might possibly lead.

He found Catherine engaged in trying on a court dress, one of those ordered for the grand ceremonies of the imperial wedding. She flung everything aside on seeing her husband enter, and was about to rush into his arms for her usual embrace, when, noticing the troubled look upon his face, she stopped short with a cry of alarm.

"Heavens! What's the matter?" she exclaimed. "Is anything wrong with the emperor?"

"No, his Majesty is well—very well."

"You take quite a load off my heart."

The possibility or fear of Napoleon's sudden death haunted every one's mind at that period. It seemed the greatest catastrophe that could take place, and the apprehension was not only felt by all those who were in the emperor's immediate circle, but was shared by the whole nation.

The *maréchale*, reassured on that point, returned to the charge. "Well, what is it, then? You're rushing up and down like a madman. Is it anything serious?"

"Very serious."

"Have you been quarrelling with his Majesty?"

"Yes; we had rather a tough dispute, and I won the battle."

Catherine gave a long low whistle. "Beating the emperor is a very dangerous pastime; he might take his revenge."

"Possibly, but not probably."

"What was it about?"

"About you."

"Wha—a—t!!!"

"It's quite true. He wanted to give me some money to buy a fine large country-house."

"And why didn't you take it? You refused it on my account? Why, I should love to live in the country! We could keep a fine large carriage to ride about in, and some pigs and a cow and a goat. Oh, it would be perfectly delightful! Besides, you know, Lefebvre, I'm beginning to have about enough of these fine court ladies, who give themselves such airs and look down so mightily upon us. His Majesty's *fêtes* and receptions may be very grand, but they're horribly dull. All these marriage festivities that are coming on mean very little to us, except that we must be dressed to suffocation and remain stuck up in one position for hours together. . . . If the emperor wants us to go into the country, don't you mind me, but let him buy the place, and we'll be off to it at once. There'll be no fighting for a long time yet, and you can take a good rest. I'm surprised that you didn't jump at his Majesty's offer!"

"Well, you see, Catherine, the emperor's offer only referred to you."

"What do you mean? Only to me?"

"I was to stay here at the court, with him."

"That's a fine thing! Separate us in time of peace! I can understand that you don't want women hanging about you when you are in camp, and even

When I think I've been useful to you occasionally. But now—when the whole of Europe is at rest! Why, what's the emperor thinking of? Does he want to raise you higher still? Are you to be sent out to govern a state, perhaps, in the place of one of his good-for-nothing brothers?"

"No, Catherine, you haven't hit it with all your guessing. He wants me to follow his example, and marry another woman."

"Divorce! He dared to propose that to you? The wretch! And what answer did you give him?"

With a smile, the marshal opened his arms, and Catherine flew to embrace him in good hearty *bourgeois* fashion. This embrace of the loyal-hearted couple was a silent but vigorous protest against the proposal that the emperor had been ill advised enough to make, and the tender passion manifested so strongly on both sides served to allay their mutual fears concerning the success of any fresh overtures that might be made to either.

"But you haven't told me yet what reply you gave the emperor," said Catherine, after a few moments of blissful silence.

Lefebvre drew his wife towards a sofa, and taking a seat beside her, placed his arm about her waist, as in the early days of their honeymoon, while he narrated his scene with Napoleon.

"I told him, Catherine, that I loved you, and only you; that after having lived happily together for so many years, we had but one desire, and that was to

pass the remainder of our existence in each other's company."

"That was well said, old man! Why does he want to interfere with us? Because he has divorced his own wife, does he want every one to do the same? To whom did he want to marry you? Tell me her name, or I shall feel jealous of every woman I come across. Possibly it was one of his mistresses he wanted to get off his hands! Was it the Gazzami . . . or Eléonore . . . or his Polish beauty, Madame Walewska?"

"He didn't mention any one in particular."

"A good thing for them!"

"He merely spoke in a general way. I believe he wishes all his officers to take a pattern by him. He marries an archduchess, and he would like to see all those about him allied to the daughters of the nobility."

"What an idea! I'll leave you out of the question, Lefebvre, because I know what your opinion is on the subject, but take the other marshals—what on earth could they do with these fine young ladies, all so proud of their ancestry? Didn't Augereau's mother keep a fish-stall in the *Halles*; and haven't Ney and Messena, and, in fact, all the others, sprung from the people, just the same as we have? It is madness to give these men wives who will blush for them, ridicule them behind their backs, and probably betray them with those who are really of their own rank. Lefebvre, I'm beginning to think that Napoleon is a little mad. I'm sure he proves it by marrying the

daughter of an emperor, a proud Austrian woman who no doubt looks upon him as a vulgar political adventurer."

"The emperor has his reasons."

"And we have ours. . . . So you have refused his proposal, definitely?"

"You can surely have no doubt about it," said Lefebvre, with a tender smile. "I am certain that you know me better than to think I would ever marry another woman."

"Well, you couldn't if you wished," replied Catherine, archly; "you belong to me for life."

"True; I swore that before the municipal officer when I married you. It's a long time ago, but I've not forgotten it."

"Ah! but I'm not talking of your oath before the municipal officer. There is something that you couldn't forget if you would."

"What do you mean?" asked Lefebvre.

"This, of course!" And Catherine, seizing her husband's wrist, turned back the sleeve of his coat, and displayed on the marshal's arm two hearts in flames, beneath which stood out as fresh as on the day when it was done, the motto, "True to Catherine till death!"

It was the tattoo-mark that Lefebvre had jestingly referred to on the eve of his marriage as his wedding present.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Catherine, triumphantly. "Could you marry an archduchess with a thing like that on your arm?"

Whatever would she say if she caught sight of it? She would want to know who this Catherine was to whom you promised to be true till death, and it might lead to a few scenes. Oh! you can't deny your promise, old man; it's written there too plainly."

"True," said Lefebvre, laughing heartily. "And what do you think of this arm; how would her Highness like this?" Rolling back his other sleeve, he displayed a second inscription, which read, "Death to all tyrants!"

"It's no use, Lefebvre; you see that we're bound to each other for life," said Catherine, resting her head on her husband's shoulder, whilst he murmured in response, "For life!"

"I wish Napoleon would come in and catch us like this!" whispered the *maréchale*; and a smile of happiness and contentment passed over the faces of the honest couple as they reflected how far above the highest favours an emperor can bestow is the pure undying love of husband and wife.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### TRAINING AN EMPRESS.

IN one of the plainly furnished apartments that she occupied on the second floor of the imperial palace at Vienna Marie Louise sat, lost in daydreams, whilst idly playing with a little beribboned spaniel that had been presented to her by the English ambassador.

The antics of the dainty puppy and the reverie of his mistress were both roughly disturbed by the somewhat boisterous entry of one of the maids of honour, who, gasping for breath, could scarcely get a word out in her evident state of excitement.

“What’s the matter?” cried the princess, in alarm. “Is the palace on fire?”

“No—no fire,” gasped the woman. “His Majesty the emperor is coming here.”

“My father—here, in this room! Good Heavens, what for?”

“I don’t know; but I suppose your Highness will soon hear all about it.” And the duenna, who had somewhat recovered from her unwonted exertions, made a deep reverence as the Emperor of Austria at that moment entered. The reason of his coming to

his daughter's apartments—an unwonted procedure on his part—was to announce to Marie Louise that he had arranged a marriage between her and Napoleon.

The young princess was eighteen years of age—a good strapping girl, well built, and with a fresh ruddy complexion, but with no pretensions to graces or to much style. She was rather pretty, but her good looks were those of a robust village maiden, and did not bear that stamp of delicacy one might expect to find in a daughter of the illustrious house of Hapsburg. It was difficult to say where her waist might be, her dresses, made in the fashion of the day, hanging straight away from her well-developed bust, and displaying a pair of large feet. Her full lips indicated a sensual nature, while the large pale blue eyes lacked both expression and intelligence. Taken altogether, she was a fine creature, and one that gave great promise of being, physically, an excellent mother. Napoleon had made inquiries on all sides concerning the health and vigour of his future bride, and the replies received had been eminently satisfactory respecting all those points that he considered of the first importance.

The information that had been sent him regarding her moral virtues was equally reassuring. She had been brought up with infinite care, and subjected to an exceedingly rigorous, almost conventual, discipline. Her accomplishments were numerous and varied. She could speak nearly all the languages of Europe—French, English, German, Italian, Spanish, Bohemian, and even Turkish. She was destined to become the

wife of some monarch or other, and it was necessary that she should be able to understand her subjects. Music had not been forgotten. The harp bought by Napoleon, and which had been much admired at the Tuileries, proved that her future husband had not been left in ignorance of her talents in this direction.

In point of religion, more stress had been laid upon the observance of outward forms and ceremonies than upon the acceptation of any deep-laid dogmas. The hazard of political events might bring her a husband who belonged to any of the four or five churches amongst which the reigning families of Europe were divided, and the court of Vienna could not afford to let religion be an obstacle to an alliance that might further its interests. While having an intimate acquaintance with the forms of all religions, the princess would follow the rites of the country over which the political advisers of her father chose that she should reign.

Her daily life had been passed in extremely simple fashion, mainly owing to the financial embarrassments in which the Emperor Francis found himself. Reverses of war, the loss of provinces, the payment of indemnities to the conqueror, and the expense of keeping up a large standing army, had exhausted the Austrian treasury. The court was obliged to exercise strict economy, and no unnecessary luxuries were permitted even on ceremonious occasions. Of the latter, by the way, there were very few, small-and-earlies, like those given by the frugal burghers of Vienna, with a little music and light refreshments, taking the place

of many a State ball. The palace, too, was furnished in anything but regal fashion, the long cheerless galleries being bare of any art treasures or objects of real value, while the interior of most of the apartments would have compared unfavourably with those of a really good inn. The imperial family, it is true, had never made a prolonged stay in the capital on the Danube, having times out of number had to decamp before the advance of the French army. In fact, the whole of the young princess's youth had been spent in packing and unpacking to get out of the way of the Corsican ogre, whose name was a terror and bugbear throughout the whole country.

Francis II. was, therefore, by no means at ease concerning the reception his daughter would accord to the news that he had disposed of her hand to the brigand Napoleon was represented to be. He had put off making the communication as long as possible, but now that Berthier was already *en route*, and the marriage by procuracy had been fixed to take place the following week, he deemed it high time to acquaint the person chiefly interested of the future that had been marked out for her.

Marie Louise received her father's commands with surprising docility, declaring that she was nowise displeased with the proposed alliance. She knew that France was a great and glorious country, and that a marriage with its emperor would place her on a footing of equality with the mightiest sovereigns of Europe. She learnt with evident satisfaction from her father that there was no queen or empress who

would be able to vie with her either in absolute power or in the magnificence of her establishment, and the enumeration of the many costly gifts that Napoleon had already set aside for his future bride made her long to be on her way to Paris.

Like a well-trained young lady, she expressed her regret at having to leave her fond papa and the dear court in which she had been so happy, but declared her readiness to obey those who were wiser than herself, and to become the wife of the man that had been chosen for her. There were no tears, and no scenes such as Francis had reasonably expected. His daughter showed no anxiety to know anything about the private life or personality of the great soldier who had hitherto inspired her with such terror, the points upon which she seemed most anxious to have information being the number and value of her wedding gifts.

Before departing, the emperor said, "You are going to leave home, Louise, for a strange court, in which you will no doubt be surrounded by a brilliant suite of noble ladies and brave soldiers, but in which you will find nothing to make you think of us and of your country. . . . I therefore think it would be pleasant to take with you a being who will remind you of your old home, and on whose fidelity and devotion you may rely——"

"You mean Zozo, my pretty little 'King Charles'! Why, of course he shall go!" cried the princess, clapping her hands.

"I'm not talking about Zozo," said the emperor,

smiling at his daughter's mistake. "Besides, I've heard that Napoleon hates dogs. Zozo had better stay here; we'll take good care of him."

Marie Louise felt deeply pained, and showed her displeasure by tapping the carpet with her foot, while she wiped away a tear with the corner of her handkerchief.

Her dog Zozo was perhaps the only thing she really cared for. Love was a sentiment entirely unknown to her virginal heart, though, if history spoke true, the women of her family had been no strangers to the noble passion, nor particular in their choice of means for gratifying it. Cupid had, it is true, already made an attempt to reach her, but Marie Louise, in whom a few years later a vulgar infatuation was to overcome all the nobler feelings of the heart and mind—who was to abandon husband, child, and throne to pander to her own lawless amours—was then scarcely disposed to lend an ear to the whisperings of the chubby little god.

One day, whilst taking a walk in the gardens of the palace at Schoenbrunn, she saw a few forget-me-nots growing on the margin of one of the lakelets, and bent down to pluck them. The vigorous wrench she gave caused the roots to come out of the damp ground rather suddenly, and, losing her balance, the princess staggered backwards, and would undoubtedly have gone to join the gold-fish swimming so prettily in the pellucid waters of the lake, had not a timely arm been stretched out to save her from that disagreeable *contretemps*

Marie Louise thanked her rescuer, whose face was unknown to her, with all the grace she could summon, and giving him her hand, said smilingly, "Thank you, sir. I hesitate to think what would have been my fate had it not been for your assistance."

The nobleman—for such his clothes and bearing proclaimed him to be—bent down and pressed his lips upon the hand held out to him.

"And all for a flower that I shall never have!" continued the princess, on whom the manners and appearance of her rescuer seemed to have made a favourable impression.

In her fall the little bunch of forget-me-nots had escaped from her grasp and was now drifting away on the waters of the lake, while Marie Louise looked ruefully after it. She had scarcely uttered her lament, when the nobleman, who was elegantly dressed, dived, without a moment's hesitation, into the clear pool, although it was already very late in autumn, and the water anything but warm. For one who was no longer a young man, he swam for some fifty or sixty yards with marvellous grace and vigour, and seizing the flowers, brought them safely back to land.

Marie Louise, surprised and charmed, seized, perhaps, by one of those secret but unfailing presentiments that are the forerunners of more defined feelings in matters of love, immediately felt greatly interested in one who, after having saved her from a disagreeable mishap, had gallantly plunged into the icy waters to bring her back a simple flower. The gallant looked

rather comical in his fine clothes all covered with mud, and his wig all awry and strewn with weeds, but the princess could not help remarking how long and earnestly he gazed at the bunch of flowers as he handed it to her after having pressed it to his lips.

With a respectful bow, he was about to leave Marie Louise to the care of the maid of honour who had come hastening up on seeing her young mistress in the company of a man. But the princess detained him.

“Will you not tell me your name, sir?” she asked. “My father, the emperor, will be glad to know who the gentleman was that did not hesitate to dive into the lake to satisfy an idle whim of mine, and of which I am now really ashamed.”

“My name is Comte de Neipperg; I am a consul-general in his Majesty’s service. I had obtained an audience of the emperor for this morning, and therefore beg your Highness to kindly excuse me, as I must make some slight change before presenting myself.”

“Do not let me detain you, count. But in case you are late, I will make your excuses to my father, and when he learns that I have been the cause of your non-appearance, he will not withhold his full pardon, I warrant you.”

She dismissed Neipperg with a smile that seemed to the nobleman to betoken more than was perhaps intended, for although every word and look of hers was treasured up in his heart, it was not long before the incident had almost faded from the mind of the princess. Perhaps she wondered a little that a serious-



looking courtier like Neipperg should have performed such a feat of gallantry for a girl's caprice, but her thoughts were as yet innocent of anything that might have suggested the impulse that led to the action. Love had no meaning for her outside the sense in which it was employed in the bonds of kinship and religion.

For all that, she had not entirely forgotten Neipperg, and sometimes thought that it would be pleasant to see him more closely attached to her father's court, at which he made but rare appearances. She was therefore agreeably surprised to hear the emperor add with a smile—

“No, child, I was not alluding to Zozo, but to the Comte de Neipperg, an officer who has satisfactorily fulfilled every important mission that I have entrusted to him. He will act as your equerry, and be always at your side. I have entire confidence in him, and I trust that you will treat this representative of my authority with kindness and respect, for he is well fitted both by his age and his past services to hold the onerous post to which I have appointed him. Unfortunately he is now a widower, otherwise we might have added his wife to your staff of women.”

The displeasure of the princess had almost entirely disappeared, and she answered with great docility, “I will do, papa, as you wish.”

## CHAPTER XXV.

## AN IMPERIAL MARRIAGE

ON the 11th of March, 1810, Marie Louise was married at Vienna by procuration, and immediately after the ceremony left for Paris in great pomp. On arriving at Brannen, a village on the Austrian frontier, she took leave of her father and of the numerous suite who had accompanied her. Though the tears coursed down the bronzed cheeks of Francis II., his daughter displayed no such weakness, and parted from her loving but unloved parent with perfect equanimity. The only thing that seemed to grieve her was the fact of having had to leave her pet dog at Vienna, and when she confided her trouble to Berthier, he smiled in a way that betokened his knowledge of some secret.

Napoleon's sister, the Queen of Naples, had come to meet her brother's bride, and rode back with her through an endless and almost monotonous succession of triumphal arches, ovations, and official receptions. Proud of this homage that was all new to her, Marie Louise showed her satisfaction in her cold calm way, and appeared neither anxious to accelerate her journey

in order to reach her husband, nor saddened by the thoughts of those she had left behind.

Occasionally she would look out of her carriage window to bestow a smile upon Neipperg, who rode by her side in his capacity as equerry, though this was more than she condescended to accord to the patient crowds who had lined the wayside since day-break, and who saluted her with deafening plaudits.

Meanwhile Napoleon was counting the days and hours, his mind a prey to the fever of love that was devouring him. Though he had never seen the woman who was now his wife, she was not absent from his thoughts for a moment, and while she was being drawn along in slow and solemn state, he was inwardly cursing all this form and ceremony, and ardently longing for the hour when he should be by her side. He sent messenger after messenger to meet his bride, and to beg her to put an end to all further unnecessary delay, in order to expedite the consummation of his happiness. To cool his passion and divert his thoughts, he spent a good deal of his time in hunting, though sport of that kind had never had much attraction for him; and when his exhausted attendants could go on no longer, he would return to the palace and amuse himself for hours together in choosing and trying on articles of attire that made him look ridiculous, and which he would, perhaps, never wear.

He would also busy himself with the carefully arranged plans of the nuptial festivities, being extremely desirous that the ceremonial observed on

the occasion of Louis the Sixteenth's marriage with Marie Antoinette should be scrupulously adhered to.

All his anxiety and impatience were due rather to the fact that he was marrying into one of the most distinguished families of Europe than to any real sentiments of love that he could yet be expected to entertain for Marie Louise. During that brief epoch of his life which commenced with his divorce and ended with the consummation of his second marriage the great conqueror appeared to less advantage than at any other period of his varied career. He was never tired of relating to those about him with childish glee how his mother had gone to market with a basket hanging on her arm, and how in his younger days he had not only experienced poverty, but absolute want. Like the meanest *bourgeois parvenu*, he seemed to be swelling with pride that he, a mere Corsican nobody, should now be about to marry an archduchess, a princess who could boast of being the direct descendant of three emperors. A true son of the people, he was awed and intimidated by the approach of his bride, who to him was almost a goddess; and he, before whom all Europe had trembled, and to satisfy whose caprice the fairest and noblest women had incurred dishonour, considered it a gracious condescension on the part of this German girl to allow him to make her his empress.

The passionate love for Marie Louise of which he gave such signal proofs at a later date was much more intelligible and reasonable than the almost boyish infatuation with which it was precluded, and

it is to be hoped that Napoleon was really ignorant, as he always pretended to be, of the relations that existed between his wife and her equerry during his exile—relations which ended in her becoming Countess de Neipperg after his death.

A detailed programme had been prepared of the procedure to be observed at the first meeting between their Majesties. This interview was to take place nearly midway between Compiègne and Soissons, where an immense platform, bearing a tastefully decorated pavilion, had been constructed by the wayside. The emperor was to leave Compiègne at the same time as Marie Louise left Soissons, and proceed to the place of meeting escorted by a brilliant suite and a mounted guard of honour. The empress would arrive a few minutes after him, and, kneeling before her lord and master, would receive the imperial kiss and rise to her feet. The pair would then be conducted in one of the State carriages to Compiègne, where the authorities would receive them with much pomp and voluminous congratulatory addresses. Such was the programme. But all this majestic ceremonial was upset by the passionate frenzy of Napoleon, whose unheard-of escapade absolutely scandalized the staid and punctilious chamberlains. As soon as he learned that the empress had left Vitry for Soissons, he lost all control over himself, and jumping into a *calèche* with Murat, he dashed along the roads at full speed to meet her. After fifteen leagues had been covered in this fashion, the carriages forming the empress's procession were met near Courcelles

Napoleon immediately alighted from his *calèche*, and getting into the carriage of the astonished empress bundled his sister out. Left alone with his wife, he lavished upon her caresses the publicity of which overwhelmed her with confusion, and probably inspired her with fear and even repulsion.

The emperor had given the postilions orders to whip up the horses and to make straight for Compiègne. The procession, therefore, dashed past the pavilion erected for the official reception, leaving the brilliant company assembled there to gaze after their sovereign and his bride in blank astonishment and despair. It was ten o'clock at night when the imperial party reached the palace of Compiègne, and supper was immediately served to the hungry and weary travellers.

The real celebration of the marriage, both before the civil authorities and at Notre-Dame, had been arranged to take place four days later, but Napoleon stoutly maintained that these were mere formal ceremonies of State, and that he had already been legally married by procuration. The fears of Marie Louise, who seemed to doubt the validity of the ceremony performed at Vienna, were, however, speedily allayed by her uncle, Cardinal Fesch, who assured her that she was at that moment the legal wife of the emperor.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning, to the stupefaction of the whole court, breakfast was laid for Napoleon by the bedside of his wife, who smiled down upon the conqueror of

Austerlitz from amid the heap of lace-covered pillows on which she reclined.

In a corner of the antechamber leading to the imperial apartments, unseen and forgotten by every one in the general bustle and confusion, sat the Comte de Neipperg, the empress's German equerry, a prey to terrible but impotent rage.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

It is exceedingly doubtful whether Marie Louise ever really cared for the emperor at all. We know how the alliance was tinkered up between those advisers of Napoleon who were anxious to pander to his ambition, and the Austrian diplomatists who wished to save their country from further depredations; and we have seen how impassively the princess received the announcement of a marriage about which she had not even been consulted. During her first few months in Paris she may possibly have felt some slight gratitude for the homage and the magnificent gifts that were showered upon her, but at a later period, when she had probably lost all recollection of the delights of her honeymoon, she herself confessed that Napoleon had never made any impression upon her heart. The manner, too, in which she received the news of his death is a proof, if any be needed, of the coolness with which she regarded one who had been to her at least a most faithful and devoted husband.

A courier from Parma had brought her the following laconic despatch from her father:—



“MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

“General Bonaparte expired at St. Helena on the 5th of May, 1821, after a long and painful illness. I beg you to accept my sincere condolence, and trust it will be some consolation to you to know that your late husband died as a Christian. I join with you in prayer for the repose of his soul, and trust that God will continue to extend His protection to your Majesty.

“FRANCIS.”

Marie Louise immediately sat down to acknowledge the receipt of this news, and to thank her father for his (almost superfluous) condolence.

“I admit,” she added, with characteristic *naïveté*, “that it is rather an unexpected blow. Although I cannot say that I ever felt any affection for him, I cannot forget that he is the father of my boy, and that, far from ill-treating me, as every one believed, he was always anxious to do all he could for me, and more than this it is impossible to expect in a political marriage. I am therefore deeply grieved to hear of his death, and though, as you say, it is a consolation to know that he ended his life in a Christian manner, I could have wished to see him enjoy many more years of happiness, provided it was not in my company. . . .”

These sentiments scarcely point to a very lively recollection of the happy days of a young wife's honeymoon, and yet in those first few hours of companionship Napoleon had fallen passionately in love

with the woman who had till that moment been to him only an idea. He cudgelled his brains to procure her fresh pleasures, loading her with costly gifts and with touching attentions. Marie Louise accepted all that was offered her with haughty indifference, as if it were a tribute to which she was justly entitled.

Only one cry of gratitude had escaped her, and that was when Berthier, on her arrival in Paris, had placed in her arms the spaniel from which she had been so grieved to part. The courtier had easily succeeded in overcoming the emperor's objection to the introduction of dogs into the palace; and when Napoleon had seen the joy with which his young wife received her little pet, he blessed the happy idea of the envoy, and went about for the rest of the day dinning the empress's love for dumb animals into every one's ears.

Not only did he conquer his dislike of dogs out of love for his dear Louise, as he called her, but considerably modified one of his most inveterate habits—that of eating quickly, and of considering mealtime as a momentary halt in the business of the day. The empress had an enormous appetite, and loved to linger over her repasts, which were varied and copious. Napoleon was obliged to resign himself with a good grace, and would sit quietly watching his wife putting even his marshals to the blush in the matter of digestion.

To please her, too, he, the emperor, a man in his forty-first year, would lay aside his dignity, and take part in the games which the younger ladies instituted

in the grounds of the palace, playing at hide-and-seek, blind-man's buff, and puss-in-the-corner with all the ardour of a romping schoolboy.

Then Marie Louise, who had never been upon a horse in her life, took it into her head that a good daily gallop would benefit her health, and the emperor, fearing to trust her into other hands, instituted himself her riding-master, and neglected, for the first time in his life, the most pressing affairs of State and all the administrative details of his vast empire to go trotting about the park of Compiègne by the side of the young Amazon. Occasionally, however, political complications of such moment would arise that he would be forced to renounce his usual ride, and beg the empress to excuse him from accompanying her that morning.

At such times Marie Louise would appear nowise disappointed, and, summoning her faithful equerry Neipperg, would trip gaily down the staircase, followed by the rueful glances of Napoleon, who, far from suspecting any infidelity in his nobly-born wife, was only concerned about her physical safety. The Comte de Neipperg had been chosen by Francis II. himself as a kind of body-guard for his daughter, and the idea of the empress holding an intrigue with a man of his age and subordinate position was too preposterous to be entertained.

But Napoleon had never had much confidence in woman's fidelity, and wishing in the present case to be on the safe side, he had taken the precaution of entrusting the empress's *personal safety* to the

unremitting but secret care of Fouché, the Minister of Police, and his faithful and reliable band of subordinates. He therefore felt pretty safe on that score, and his rage was all the more terrible when he discovered, or thought he discovered, some secret, though possibly innocent, attachment between Marie Louise and Neipperg.

The empress had one day gone out riding, accompanied only by her equerry, and Napoleon, having finished work with his secretaries sooner than he had anticipated, determined to give his wife an agreeable surprise by going out to meet her. The roads were soft, and he had no difficulty in following the traces left by the hoofs of the two horses. Suddenly, however, he was nonplussed by finding that these stopped abruptly in the middle of a long avenue, until the down-trodden grass by the wayside showed him that the riders had left the road to plunge into the wood.

Leaving his own equerry in waiting with the horses, he penetrated into the thicket, and had not gone far before he found two horses tethered together, one of which he recognized as that of the empress. Making his way along with extreme caution, he soon found himself on the borders of a small clearing, in the centre of which stood a rustic kiosk, which served as a shelter for the keepers or sportsmen when overtaken by a storm.

Napoleon had no difficulty in recognizing the two voices that were heard coming from the kiosk, the shrill soprano of the empress contrasting strangely in his burning ears with the deep baritone of the count.

His eyes flashed fire, and the fingers that grasped the handle of his riding-whip twitched nervously. As he stood there, vainly trying to distinguish the subject of the conversation, there crept into his mind vague doubts and suspicions, which gradually took shape until they maddened him.

Rushing into the trellis-covered hut, he found Neipperg standing at a respectful distance from the empress; but his jealousy had now been too thoroughly aroused to be allayed by such a trifling circumstance, and he shouted furiously, "What are you doing here, sir? Get out of this place! What do you mean by holding a *tête-à-tête* with the empress in the depths of the woods?"

Neipperg bowed, and immediately left the kiosk.

Marie Louise, losing none of her usual serenity, laughed lightly and said, "Whatever is the matter with you, Napoleon? You don't mean to say you are jealous of my equerry?"

The emperor, whose anger was not proof against the charms of his wife, stammered out an apology, but it was some time before he had entirely resumed his wonted calm.

Jealousy was a base sentiment that he felt to be beneath his dignity, and although the equerry had been honoured with the entire confidence of his wife's august father, the terms of familiarity upon which the man seemed to stand with his sovereign rendered his departure from the court not only advisable but imperative. He would that very day receive an order to return to Vienna, and a round sum to

indemnify him for his removal, while Fouché, the emperor resolved, should be made to resign his post as a punishment for the carelessness he had shown in carrying out the imperial commands.

Marie Louise made no demur to her equerry's departure, but her resentment of the emperor's behaviour was none the less keen because it was hidden. Napoleon had made himself perfectly ridiculous with his doubts and suspicions, and Neipperg, in whom she had hitherto felt only a kindly interest, appeared to her as the victim of conjugal tyranny. The emperor's treatment of him brought him into her thoughts more than ever, especially when she found herself deprived of a thousand little attentions that he had shown her. Recollections of the circumstances under which she had first beheld him came back most vividly, and the adventure by the lake received new significance in her eyes. She understood at last that Neipperg loved her. She confessed to herself that the thought did not displease her, though she smiled at the idea that she, the haughty empress, upon whom the great Napoleon had failed to make any impression, should be inclined to listen to the aspirations of a poor dependant.

On the day of Neipperg's departure, she shed a few tears of rage in secret, and kept her room on a plea of indisposition. As the equerry was stepping into the carriage that was to bear him away, one of the maids handed him a small casket, which he opened with trembling fingers. It contained a ring and a little flower—a forget-me-not similar to those he had saved for *her* from the lake at Schoenbrunn.

Placing the ring upon his finger, he pressed the flower to his lips, and as he took his seat in the coach he gave one last look in the direction of the empress's room.

Marie Louise, who was stationed behind one of the curtains, had seen both the kiss and the upward glance, and treasured them both within the recesses of her heart.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## CATHERINE'S REVENGE.

MARIE LOUISE, Empress of the French, was holding her first drawing-room after her coronation, and since every one was naturally eager to gaze upon the girl whom Napoleon had chosen to share his throne and perpetuate his race, the palace was crowded with the fair women of the new aristocracy of France. The presence of men was not absolutely tabooed, but it was understood that the empress had organized this reception chiefly for the purpose of becoming personally acquainted with the wives and daughters of those who had fought her husband's battles, and though a few uniforms were to be seen here and there, forming little patches of colour amid the ocean of white shoulders and gauzy muslins, their wearers were mostly officials, whose services were required for presenting the ladies to their new sovereign. It was no mean task to marshal this formidable army of women, many of whom were scarcely one generation removed from the fish-stall and the wash-tub, and who during Josephine's time had accordingly been allowed a certain immunity from the strict court



etiquette. But the emperor had sent forth his fiat that under Marie Louise the order of ceremonial obtaining in the reign of Louis XVI. should be rigidly enforced, and each of these *parvenues* was therefore in a fever of expectation to see how the others would comport themselves in the new state of things.

The Duchess of Dantzic, presuming on her rank, which was equalled only by that of the emperor's sisters, was one of the last to arrive, and her appearance was the signal for a perfect buzz of malicious comment and envious satire. The lives of many of these women, who could never forgive the washerwoman of the Rue Royale for having risen to the height of duchess, and who were themselves of very humble extraction, contained incidents that would scarcely bear the light of day.

Catherine, on the contrary, enjoyed such a stainless reputation that the purity of her private life was a standing joke amongst the less squeamish ladies of the court. The fact of having remained loyal to one man for so many years, far from giving her a claim to their respect, only served to arouse their contempt.

The fidelity, too, of her husband was looked upon as something almost unique amongst the gallant warriors of the empire, and had, strange to say, not even suffered those occasional lapses in which Napoleon set his lieutenants such a terrible example. "The emperor may amuse himself in his own fashion," Lefebvre would say, with a shake of his head; "this is the one field of action into which I shall not follow his Majesty."

This Achilles, who had risen from the rank of a simple soldier, was, indeed, a remarkable figure at the court of Napoleon. He was still the staunch Republican that he always had been, and his honesty was proved by the fact that he had refused to form part of the Directory with Carnot and Barras on the plea of being too ignorant for such an important post. The high esteem in which he was held by his imperial master no doubt protected his wife to some extent from the too persistent attacks of her enemies, but Napoleon's two sisters and the ladies who formed their suite never let slip an opportunity of turning the true-hearted but rather too outspoken *maréchale* to ridicule.

The present occasion was an excellent one, a story that had gone the round of the court circle during the past day or two causing a good deal of merriment at Catherine's expense.

The duchess, in magnificent court robes, her hair dressed with a splendid plume of ostrich feathers, and a long cloak of blue velvet embroidered with gold trailing behind her, swept along the corridors till she reached the threshold of the drawing-room. That very morning she had rehearsed with Despréaux the ceremony of her official presentation, and she slackened her speed in order that her movements before the assembled court should be replete with that quiet dignity upon which the dancing-master had laid so much stress.

The chamberlain, who had frequently announced her at the Tuileries before she had attained the rank

of duchess, was unaware of her arrival until her rapid strides had brought her almost beside him, and forgetting her new title in his perturbation, he gave out in his best style, "Madame la Maréchale Lefebvre!"

The empress, however, fully cognizant of the honour due to her last guest, slowly descended the steps of the throne, and with a gracious smile bade "Madame la Duchesse de Dantzic" a hearty welcome. Catherine hereupon turned to the obsequious but forgetful chamberlain with a look of triumph, exclaiming, "I say, old boy, d'ye hear that? That's one in the eye for you!"

This rebuke naturally called forth roars of laughter, which even the stolidity of countenance of the empress failed to stifle, and it was some moments before order was sufficiently restored to enable Catherine to hear the words with which Marie Louise strove to put her at her ease. The maréchale had great difficulty in repressing her indignation, and muttered to herself, "Ah! if only the emperor were here, I'd give them a bit of my tongue."

As soon as the general hum of conversation had been resumed, a pert, clean-shaven little man approached the duchess and made her a respectful bow.

"You do not recognize me, Madame la Duchesse," he commenced.

"I can't say I do, but I know I've seen you somewhere."

"Quite so; we are old acquaintances. I had the honour of knowing you when you had not yet attained the elevated rank——"

"You mean when I was a laundress? Out with it, sir; I'm not ashamed of my old profession, nor is Lefebvre. I can assure you I have still the dress in which I used to wash; it may come handy some day!"

"Well, Madame la Duchesse," continued the soft-spoken little man, "I well remember that at a public ball, where I had the pleasure of being in your company, a sorcerer predicted that you would one day be a duchess."

"I remember—I remember!" cried Catherine. "You are Monsieur Fouché, and you said in a joke that you would be Minister of Police when I was a duchess. I can assure you I never dreamt that the little man at the ball, whose name I had forgotten, and Monsieur Fouché, the terrible Minister of Police, were one and the same person."

"Alas! I am Minister of Police no longer, Madame la Duchesse; but whenever I can be of any service to you in a private capacity, I beg that you will command me." The wily ex-minister well knew the favour that Catherine and her husband enjoyed at court, and was anxious to conciliate their good graces. "You have many rivals and even enemies here, Madame la Duchesse," he continued, lowering his voice, "and you must not give them the chance of ridiculing you on account of a trifling slip that might easily be avoided."

"Well, Monsieur Fouché, you know that I was always pretty blunt, and though I know that there are a great many things that can't be said in polite

society, I forget all that when once my tongue is on the wag, and I don't care a —— There, I was going to do it again!"

"Look here, my dear duchess; when I see you getting too close to the trap-doors with which this court, like all other courts, abounds, will you allow me to call out 'Danger!' as we used to do when playing blind-man's buff?"

"You will oblige me very much. How can I be expected to know anything about court manners, when half my life was passed at the wash-tub and in the canteen?"

"Well, my dear duchess, keep your eye on me, and when I tap the lid of my snuff-box with my two fingers, like this, you must stop; it will mean danger."

"Right you are, Monsieur Fouché; I'll keep my eye on you and your snuff-box."

"Especially my snuff-box."

And having satisfactorily concluded this arrangement, the pair followed the empress into the adjoining room, where supper had been laid for the more distinguished guests.

A plan had been carefully prepared by the Queen of Naples and her sister Elisa, by which Catherine was to be turned to further ridicule before the empress and the select assembly gathered about her. The astute Fouché had got an inkling of this, and determined to save his new *protégée*, if possible, from falling into the trap. From the broken sentences of conversation that could be heard amid the clatter of

knives and forks, and the shouts of laughter that accompanied them, it was evident that Catherine's adventure of a few days ago was not only again on the *tapis*, but was affording intense delight to those who had not yet heard it. The facts were these.

A very fine diamond belonging to the Duchess of Dantzic had disappeared from the case in which it was kept, and suspicion had fallen upon one of the floor-polishers who had been admitted into the room to ply his vocation. The industrious gentleman naturally denied the soft impeachment most emphatically, and the police were sent for. They searched the accused in the usual perfunctory way, but without success. The duchess, however, who had been present at this operation, was by no means satisfied with the manner in which it had been conducted.

"Bah! that's child's play! I can see you are all novices at this game," she said, turning to the officers. "If you had seen Saint-Just, Lebas, and the other commissaries at work in the days of the Terror, you would know that there are other hiding-places besides pockets, hats, and boots. . . . Let me have a try!" The prisoner's costume was then, by her orders, reduced to that in which Adam paraded before the Fall, and a more rigorous search than the officers had deemed it necessary to make resulted in the tardy production of the missing diamond.

The adventure got bruited about, and created perfect roars of merriment, especially when the *maré-chale* herself could be induced to tell the tale in her own *naïve* way.

The Queen of Naples wished her to commit the imprudence of relating it at table and before the empress; and Catherine, suspecting no harm, was about to comply with the hypocritical request, when Fouché, who was seated near her, tapped the lid of his snuff-box significantly.

"The deuce!" exclaimed the *maréchale*, inwardly. "Fouché seems to think there's danger. I'm glad he warned me in time."

A moment's reflection served to show her the trap into which she had been almost lured, and with characteristic impetuosity she determined to read these grand ladies, who were nothing more than mere dependants upon Napoleon's generosity, a lesson they were not likely to forget.

Rising from her chair with heightened colour and flashing eyes, she addressed herself to the emperor's sisters, Caroline and Elisa.

"Both your Majesty and your Imperial Highness show a poor woman like me much honour, because she succeeded in unmasking a wretched thief who stole a rare bauble—a poor devil of a fellow who was neither a marshal nor a king—no, not even related to the emperor. These pilferers of trifles get caught, *mesdames*, whilst others, whose thefts are on a grander scale, are treated with honour and respect. . . . Honestly speaking, it was very wrong of me to wrench this diamond from a poor wretch who had need of it, when so many illustrious thieves are allowed to plunder the empire and share the spoils among themselves!"

Catherine's words produced a tremendous effect upon the whole assembly, but especially upon the brilliant suite in attendance upon the Queen of Naples. Fouché was beating a very devil's tattoo upon his snuff-box, but the *maréchale* was wound up, and either could not or would not stop.

"Yes," she cried, continuing her tirade, "the emperor is too good—too weak. His Majesty, who scarcely requires any money at all for his own frugal wants, and who could live, if necessary, on a captain's pay, allows all those who have licked their way into his favour to plunder at will and squander away the substance of the people. It's not a poor polisher who ought to be stripped, but the marshals and sovereigns who have been created and crowned by Napoleon."

Trembling with passion, and strong in the knowledge of Lefebvre's unimpeachable probity, Catherine Sans-Gêne flung her words in the teeth of the insolent women whose husbands and lovers were preying upon the empire until the time should come for them to betray the emperor.

Caroline of Naples, a queen in name, retorted with a contemptuous laugh. "Madame la Duchesse would perhaps like to see a return to the good old days of the Republic. . . . What pleasant times those were, when all men were brothers, and suspected each other of treason if they only washed their hands!"

"You have no right to insult the Republic nor those who fought for it!" cried Catherine. "They were all heroes, and Lefebvre was of them. . . . They did not fight, like your husbands and your lovers, to



gain promotion and prize-money, to pillage whole provinces and ransack the Treasury. . . . The soldiers of the Republic fought to free an oppressed people, to break the bonds of slavery, to glorify France and defend its liberty. Those who came after them fought bravely too, no doubt, but it was the profit that glory brought, rather than glory itself, that attracted them. . . . The emperor cannot see that some day, when Fortune has ceased to smile upon him, when there will be no more plunder to get, and when it will perhaps be necessary to defend the very ground on which we now stand, all these fine soldiers will cry out for rest. Not one of them will be content to fight for the sake of honour and his country; they will all want peace, and pretend that France is too exhausted to prolong the struggle. Then our dear emperor will think with regret of the soldiers of the Republic! When he seeks staunch friends to help him ward off the peril that threatens the empire, he will do well not to rely upon a horde of kings and queens whose one desire it is to preserve their tottering thrones!"

Each of Catherine's words cut like a knife into the women for whom they were intended. The Princess Elisa rose, saying to her sister Caroline, "Let us go. We cannot stoop to bandy words with a washer-woman, or a vivandière, of whom our brother has made a duchess!"

With a stately bow to the empress they retired from the assembly, followed by their suites, and, to put an end to the consternation that ensued, Marie Louise was fain to follow their example.

Fouché approached Catherine with a look of mild reproof. "I think you allowed your tongue to get the better of you this time, my dear duchess, and yet I was not chary of my warnings. But you were fairly off, and nothing could stop you."

"Don't be afraid, Monsieur Fouché," said Catherine, with surprising serenity. "I shall tell the emperor all about it, and when he hears what took place, I'll bet you he'll say I was right!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THE RETURN.

‘YOUR hat has arrived, Madame la Duchesse,’ said Lise, Catherine’s maid, interrupting her mistress, as the latter turned and posed in every conceivable attitude before a pier-glass in order to be certain that there was no fault in the riding-habit she was trying on.

A hunting-party at Compiègne had been organized by the emperor for the next day, and the Duchess of Dantzic had ordered an entire new outfit to do honour to the occasion. The tailor had evidently presumed too much upon his fair client’s powers of compression, for the tightness of the skirt and bodice had caused the buxom duchess a deal of anxiety.

“I never thought I should be able to get into that, and now that I’ve got it all on I’m certain I shall burst the lot before the eyes of the whole court! And then they’ll laugh at me again!” she added, with a sigh. “Bah! what do I care?” she went on, with a laugh. “I’m worth as much as any dozen of those vixens, with their fine airs! If I could only get one of them alone—Queen Caroline, for instance! Sister

or no sister of the emperor, she'd feel the weight of my fist—the beauty! We've sworn respect and obedience to his Majesty, but not to her. I'd like to know what she has done for the country or the army to be a queen. Let's have a look at the hat, Lise!"

Snatching the hat from the maid's hands, she stuck it on the back of her head, and took a good look at herself in the glass.

"Doesn't suit me at all!"

"I think it does," the maid ventured to remark.

"You know nothing at all about it, Lise; neither do I, for the matter of that."

"Does Madame la Duchesse think it is too large?"

"Too small. The fellow doesn't know how to make a hat."

"He makes the emperor's, madame. Would Madame la Duchesse like to see him herself? He is in the ante-room."

"Is it the old boy himself?"

"No, madame, one of his assistants."

"Well, let him come in." And Catherine resumed her place before the glass, striking all manner of attitudes to convince herself that her new riding-habit would not burst so readily. Meanwhile the door had opened, but the presence of a tradesman's assistant did not disturb the *nonchalance* of La Maréchale Sans-Gêne, and it was not until she had caught sight of the man's face in the glass that she swung round with a suppressed cry.

Turning to Lise, who was left to draw her own, and no very flattering conclusions, from her mistress's

strange behaviour, she ordered her in hurried tones to leave the room. No sooner was she alone with the pretended hatter's assistant, than she caught him by the hands and exclaimed excitedly—

“You here—at Compiègne! Why?”

“Chance took me to the shop of your hatter, in Paris. I heard that he was sending you a hat, so I followed his boy, who, for a twenty-franc piece, gave me his box, and is waiting for me at the nearest wine-shop. I took his place, and I think I've played the part pretty well. Your people were all taken in. Lackey No. 1 proposed I should put something on the price, and give him half. Then lackey No. 2 wanted his commission, and your maid reminded me that I was not to forget her perquisites. So you see there's nothing to fear!”

“But how imprudent of you! Don't you know what enemies you have at court?”

“Only the emperor!”

“I should think that's quite enough. What a terrible to-do there would be if it were known that the Comte de Neipperg was here!”

“But it won't be known,” replied Neipperg, who, unable to bear the separation imposed upon him any longer, had braved all dangers and returned to France to see Marie Louise.

“But the spies!” cried Catherine in alarm. “Remember that you are observed, watched, tracked. There is no doubt of it that the emperor has had all your movements reported to him, and I know that the empress's women have been bribed to tell him all

they know. I warn you that if your presence in France is discovered, you are a lost man!"

"I shall not stay very long; within two days, at most, I shall be on the road back to Vienna."

"Then why did you come?"

"I must see Marie Louise."

"Impossible! Why are you so obstinate? You are worse than imprudent—you are wicked. You have no right to trouble the peace of mind of the empress, to expose her to suspicion."

Neipperg reflected for a moment, then taking Catherine's hand, he said with deep emotion, "My dear duchess, do not question me too closely! Do not attempt to probe the wound in my heart. You have guessed—you know—that I love the empress, and something tells me that she is not entirely indifferent to me."

"Fool! An intrigue with the empress means death to yourself, shame and repudiation for her. Why don't you give up this senseless passion?"

"I cannot; this mad love will be extinguished only with my life," cried Neipperg with the energy of despair. "But I will take care that my presumption shall not harm her I love."

"What are your intentions? What rash attempt have you come here to make?"

"I have told you. I want one last interview with the empress, so that I may return her something she once confided to my care."

"Some love-pledge?"

"Exactly—this ring," said Neipperg, drawing a small

case from his pocket. Opening it, he took out the ring that Marie Louise had given him, together with a forget-me-not, on the day of his departure.

Kissing the little trinket again and again, he replaced it in its case, while with a deep sigh he murmured, "This little jewel was more precious to me than all the treasures in the world; dearer even than life itself. And yet, alas! I must part with it."

"Is it merely to return this ring to the empress that you came all the way from Austria, and are now incurring the risk of being discovered by Napoleon's spies, and so justifying the doubts he already entertains about his wife?"

"There was no other course! Napoleon found out somehow or other that the empress had no longer this ring in her possession, and though Marie Louise protested that she had lost it, the emperor's suspicions were aroused, and he insisted that it should be sought for and found. The empress managed to send me word of this to Vienna, and I naturally started off at once. To-night Marie Louise will have regained possession of her ring, and her husband's suspicions will have vanished."

"But if you are discovered, how will you explain your presence?"

"I trust I shall not be discovered; but if I am, I will give no explanation."

"Who will help you to gain admission to the palace?"

Neipperg hesitated for a moment, and fixed his eyes upon Catherine.

"I have only one good and faithful friend in France, and that is you, my dear duchess. I had hoped that you would lend me your powerful assistance once more to help me through this dangerous business—only once more!"

"No, no; you must not rely on me!" cried Catherine, firmly, shaking her head.

"Catherine Lefebvre, do you remember the Tenth of August? Why did you take me in and protect me from the vengeance of my pursuers? Why did you not let the soldiers shoot me down?"

"The Tenth of August lies a long way behind us, mon cher comte," replied Catherine, with a dignified air. "I am the Maréchale Lefebvre, Duchess of Dantzic, and I owe all to the emperor. My husband is Napoleon's faithful subject, his companion in arms and in glory; he is a marshal of his armies, and a duke of his empire; they have fought side by side on every battle-field since the Revolution. The marshal and I cannot second the plans of the emperor's enemies, were the latter a thousand times our friends, and were we under the greatest obligations to them. If you reflect, Monsieur de Neipperg, you will see that what you ask of me is impossible. The Maréchale Lefebvre ought not even to know what brings you to France. Nothing that might cast the slightest doubt upon the emperor's honour or upon the fair name of the empress should be allowed to pass our lips."

"Then you leave me to my own resources?"

"I advise you to return to Vienna at once, without making any attempt to see the empress."



“Impossible. What am I to do about this ring?”

“Give it to me; I promise you to use the greatest discretion in returning it to her.”

As Catherine held out her hand to take the trinket, Neipperg imprinted a kiss of gratitude upon it.

“Thank you—thank you,” he murmured. “Tell the empress that though I am obliged to go, I still watch over her, and that at a word from her I shall be ever ready to fly to her assistance. To-day she is at the height of power, but who can guarantee the future?”

“I will execute your commission, count; but I do not think that the empress will ever have need to remind you of your promise, or to invoke your devoted aid.”

“Who knows, Madame la Duchesse? The very ground on which your emperor treads is undermined in every direction.”

“The mine will burst and harm only those who laid it; the emperor is protected by a higher destiny. His throne is surrounded by a troop of kings. Who would dare to brave these royal sentries, each mounting guard at the head of an army ready and eager to charge?”

“The very kings who now pay him such slavish homage will one day turn against him, avenging themselves for their forced servility. I know a great deal, my dear duchess; the secrets of the court of Vienna are an open book to me. Let your emperor be on his guard! The storm-clouds are gathering, and the thunderbolt must soon fall.”

“Whenever anything of that kind does happen, it is hardly probable that it will come from the direction of Vienna. Your emperor is the father-in-law of Napoleon.”

“But he has little respect for the relationship that binds him to the latter. He sacrificed his daughter to save a few of his provinces. A marriage that was imposed by motives of policy may be dissolved by the same reasons. As long as Napoleon rides on victoriously, he will always be treated as a son-in-law by Francis II.; but let him beware that he does not stumble, for instead of the helping hand that he might expect to find held out to him by the Emperor of Austria, he will be threatened by the point of a sword. Francis will act with the sovereigns of Russia, Prussia, and England; they are his real allies, his true family. Far from severing himself from them, he will aid them in crushing Napoleon when once the latter is down. That is the reason why I ask you to assure the empress that whenever she is threatened by danger, I shall be ready to lay down my life for her.”

“You have lugubrious presentiments, Neipperg. Fortunately, nothing has yet transpired to point to the probability of their being realized. I should advise you to repress your imagination. Do not forget that Napoleon is still powerful, that his throne still stands firm, and that he has about him devoted servants who would have no mercy for any one they caught in suspicious proximity to the empress.”

“Yes, I know. There is Roustan, the mameluke,

for instance. What would he do if he found me in her Majesty's apartments?"

"Kill you without the slightest hesitation."

"Oh! I don't think he would venture to go as far as that. Though Napoleon may surround himself with Eastern janissaries to guard his person and his wife, his palace is not a sultan's harem. He cannot gag people and throw them into the Bosphorus."

"Beware how you trifle with Napoleon's jealousy or Roustan's scimitar."

"I know that the emperor treats his wife like a prisoner, and that the bars of her cell are none the less strong because they are gilded. I hear that no man, not even the highest officers of the household, or Napoleon's best friends, may present themselves before the empress unless invited and accompanied by her husband. I am also acquainted with the blind devotion of these mamelukes; they would cut down their own father if they found him within the forbidden precincts of the palace. But"—here the count dropped his voice and looked Catherine steadily in the face—"in case the empress should send a reply by you that she wishes to see me, I have taken the precaution to render my person inviolable."

"Inviolable! What do you mean?"

"In an audience that I had with the Emperor of Austria before leaving Vienna, I gave him to understand, without informing him of the real aim of my visit to France, that I should have occasion to see the empress at Paris, at Saint Cloud, and at Compiègne; that I should be able to speak freely to her without

the presence of witnesses, and that she would thus have an opportunity of telling me whether she was really happy, and whether Napoleon treated her well. You know that the Emperor Francis is very fond of his daughter, and that his affection for her has increased since he has to reproach himself with having sacrificed her heart to the interests of his monarchy."

"Has the emperor need of a secret ambassador to learn his daughter's feelings? Is Marie Louise not free to write to her own father?"

Neipperg shrugged his shoulders. "You forget Savary," he remarked.

"What of Savary?"

"He has undertaken a sorry business. There is not a letter that leaves the Tuileries, Saint Cloud, or even Compiègne, for Vienna, that is not first unsealed, placed before the emperor, and cleverly resealed. Savary is a past-master in the noble art of letter-opening, and the Emperor of Austria, knowing this, has authorized me to procure a secret interview with his daughter. That is the reason why, in defiance of Napoleon, I am come, in this disguise, to the palace of Compiègne."

"Neipperg, take the advice I gave you, and go. Do not ruin yourself and compromise the empress."

"I have no intention of doing so."

"Then swear to leave immediately, without waiting for the empress's reply to your message."

Neipperg hesitated. Catherine, seeing this, asked boldly, "Upon whose aid do you rely for admitting

you into the empress's apartments, even if she wished to see you?"

"On that of Madame de Montebello."

"Oh, indeed—the lady-in-waiting. That is a serious undertaking on her part. My dear count, do you know that it is Lefebvre who, at the emperor's special request, has undertaken to fill the office of Grand Marshal of the Palace while we are here? Madame de Montebello is under his orders. He is responsible for the presence in the palace of every one who has not been specially summoned. You would surely not place Lefebvre in the awkward predicament of choosing between his friendship for you and his duty? In any case, you can have no doubt as to what his choice would be."

"Do you think Lefebvre would have me shot?" asked Neipperg, with a smile. "My dear duchess," he added frankly, "that is the very reason I came to you."

"And I tell you that if you were caught here, and your presence became known to the emperor, nothing could save you from death. I therefore beg you to go. The emperor is very fond of your son Henriot. Do not compromise your boy's career and ruin his future for a hopeless interview of a few moments' duration. Go at once!"

"Very well, I will obey you, though it is rather from the fear of compromising Lefebvre and my boy than for the sake of my own safety that I go."

"At once?"

"Yes," said Neipperg, hesitatingly, like one who is

at a loss for words; "my carriage is waiting on the road to Soissons. I must first go back to the hatter's boy and tell him he may return to Paris; then I'll start at once for Germany. I may rely on your giving her Majesty the ring, and telling her——"

He was interrupted by a knock at the door, and the appearance of Lise.

"What's the matter? What do you want?" cried Catherine.

"M. de Rémusat, his Majesty's chamberlain, wishes to speak to Madame la Duchesse."

"A chamberlain! Oh yes, I know," muttered Catherine. "I had a little row with the emperor's sisters yesterday. I gave it them rather hot, and I suppose they've been complaining to the emperor. Let M. de Rémusat in," she added, turning to Lise, and surprising that young woman in an inquisitive stare at the hatter's assistant who had been detained so long in her mistress's dressing-room.

"Tell your master that by your persuasion I have kept what he has sent me, but that another time I should prefer him to come himself. Good morning, young man!" And with a significant nod to Neipperg, the duchess intimated that their interview was at an end.

Sinking back into an armchair, she assumed as dignified an air as she could command, and expressed her readiness to receive his Majesty's chamberlain.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## AN OLD DEBT.

THE motive of M. de Rémusat's visit was to request the Duchess of Dantzic's immediate appearance in the emperor's study, whither Catherine determined to repair without loss of time.

Having some inkling of the drubbing that awaited her, she laid in a good stock of courage, and, relying on her ready wit, was prepared to hold her own against even the terrible conqueror of Europe. To make assurance doubly sure, however, she took the precaution to arm herself with a weapon that might be useful as a last resource. By dint of a long search in the small cabinet that contained her most costly treasures, she unearthed a small piece of paper, all yellow with age, and crumpled and folded again and again. The sight of it evidently awakened old and tender memories, for she gazed at it for some moments with a sad smile before slipping it into the bodice of her dress, and then feeling stronger and more ready to cope with the emperor's temper, she strode along the corridors of the palace of Compiègne, and soon reached the threshold of the imperial study.

Napoleon was seated at his writing-table before a mass of papers that demanded his attention. Two of his gentlemen-in-waiting, in gorgeous uniforms, were waiting for the documents as they left the emperor's hands, while Constant, his Majesty's *valet de chambre*, was busy preparing some coffee at a side table. In the corridors there was a continual rushing to and fro of messengers bearing the imperial commands.

The emperor, in a fever of agitation, was casting furious glances over a heap of cuttings from the principal news-sheets of Europe, carefully selected and prepared each day by Savary, the Minister of Police. The matter that had excited his anger for the moment were the scandalous articles dealing with his own private life, and especially with that of his sisters, the doings of Queen Caroline affording abundant scope for many piquant anecdotes. After having gone through them cursorily, the emperor would usually throw all these writings into the fire, but that evening there was one venomous article that had particularly roused his ire. It spoke of the disgrace inflicted on M. de Neipperg, the empress's equerry, a nobleman who had been specially selected to hold that post by the Emperor Francis himself, and it was insinuated that since the departure of the count Marie Louise had been inconsolable, and in a state of abject despair.

Other matters, too, had served to aggravate Napoleon's wrath that day. His two sisters, who were always wrangling because one was a queen and the other only a duchess, had drawn him into a



quarrel, which had commenced in French and terminated in a vulgar Corsican *patois*. In the middle of the dispute, Napoleon, losing all patience, and anxious to stop the shrill voices of the two viragoes, had seized the tongs and brandished them in terrible rage over the heads of his sisters. Both of these ladies, before they left the room, had lodged a formal complaint against the insolent conduct and bearing of the Maréchale Lefebvre, so that it was scarcely a friendly reception that awaited Catherine Sans-Gêne.

Roustan, the faithful mameluke, was on guard at the door, and one of the gentlemen-in-waiting, after having announced the Duchess of Dantzic, retired with his colleagues. Catherine, on entering, made a respectful obeisance, and then waited until the emperor had finished the perusal of some report.

There was deep silence in the study, broken only by the regular ticking of the elegant clock that adorned the chimney-piece, and the crackling of the logs in the hearth beneath. Suddenly the emperor raised his head and perceived his visitor.

“Ah! there you are, Madame le Maréchale! I’ve just had some fine accounts of you. What is all this that I hear about yesterday’s business? Language and conduct that furnish comment for half the news-sheets of Europe, and make my court the laughing-stock of the world! I know that you’re no fool, and I’ve no doubt that you yourself know that you can’t speak the language of courts. You’ve never learnt it, and therefore I’ve no right to find fault with your

ignorance; but why can't you keep your tongue between your teeth? Your husband the marshal made a great mistake in marrying you when he was only a sergeant!" added Napoleon, sadly, with a shake of his head.

He rose, and approaching a table on which stood a steaming coffee-urn, poured himself out a cup of the fragrant Mocha and swallowed it at a draught. Then turning to Catherine, who was patiently waiting for the storm to spend itself, he cried in short broken sentences—

"Your presence at the court has become impossible. . . . You will have to go. . . . An ample allowance will be made you, and you will have nothing to complain of on that score. . . . Your divorce will not affect either your rank or your privileges. . . . I spoke to Lefebvre about all this some time ago. Did he tell you anything of it?"

"Yes, sire; he told me all."

"And what answer did you give him?"

"Oh, I laughed at him."

The emperor was so surprised at this reply, that he dropped the silver cup that he was still holding in his hand.

"What do you mean? And Lefebvre—what did he say? What did he do?"

"He took me in his arms, and swore that in this matter he would never obey you."

"The devil! You dare to talk to me, your emperor, your master, in that fashion!"

"Sire," replied the maréchale, firmly, "you are our

emperor and our master, it is true. All that we possess is at your disposal, even our existence itself—for we owe everything to you. You are, as you say, the emperor, and at your word five hundred thousand men will rush to the banks of the Danube or the Vistula to give up their lives for your glory. But between a soldier and his wife you have no power—you cannot separate them; and if you were to attempt that kind of battle, you would be beaten.”

“Do you think so? But since you seem to be able to make such good use of your tongue, madame, you ought also to know how to restrain it, and not turn my court into a scene of daily scandals. You have insulted the Queen of Naples and the Grand Duchess of Piombino times out of number. You do not respect me in the persons of the other members of my family, and I can no longer tolerate this public insolence and outrage, which seems to be almost a kind of challenge!”

“Sire, you have been misinformed. I have only defended myself; the insults never come from me. Yesterday, for instance, your Majesty’s sisters committed an outrage upon the army.”

“An outrage upon the army! Who—what do you mean?”

“Your sisters, sire—in my person!” said Catherine, drawing herself up proudly into the rigid military attitude.

“I don’t understand you; explain yourself.”

“Your Majesty’s sisters reproached me with having been the comrade of the heroic soldiers of Sambre-

et-Meuse, the glory of whose feats has never been surpassed."

"You are right as to their glory, but how were you their comrade?"

"I accompanied Lefebvre, sire, as vivandière of the 13th Regiment."

"Do you mean to say that you took the field?" asked the emperor, suddenly mollified and interested.

"Yes, sire; I was present at Verdun, Jemappes, Altenkirchen. I have served in the armies of the North, of the Moselle, of the Rhine, and of Sambre-et-Meuse—eighteen campaigns in all; and mentioned in the Order of the Day after the battle of Altenkirchen."

"You—mentioned in the Order of the Day!"

"Yes, sire—for conspicuous bravery; and it was no easy job to get mentioned in those times. Under Hoche, Jourdan, and Lefebvre every one was a bit of a hero."

"Why, that's capital—splendid!" exclaimed the emperor, with a smile. "But why the devil has Lefebvre never told me anything of all this?"

"Why should he, sire? He received glory and honours enough for two. I'm only telling your Majesty this because circumstances required it. I generally keep these things concealed—like my wound."

"What! were you wounded, too?"

"At Fleurus I received the point of a bayonet in the upper part of my arm."

"Let me see it, Madame la Maréchale, that I may

give this pretty wounded arm the treatment it deserves."

And the emperor, turned gallant, took Catherine's arm and pressed his lips upon the scar left by an Austrian bayonet.

Forgetful of the lesson of dignity that he had been trying to inculcate upon his visitor during the earlier part of the interview, he even became pressing in his attentions, and without loosening his hold, murmured "What lovely satin skin!"

"Oh! there are no other wounds, your Majesty," cried Catherine, disengaging herself from Napoleon's nimble fingers, as they strayed over her fair arm and shoulders. "I must say that you've taken your time sire, in discovering that I have a lovely satin skin!" she added, with a roguish smile.

"But, my dear lady, I've never seen you so closely as this before, you must remember."

"Oh yes, you have, sire—a long time, a very long time ago. Carry your mind back to 1792, the year of the memorable Tenth of August. I was not yet engaged to be married to Lefebvre, and I used to come up to your little room. You were then living in the Rue du Mail."

"Quite right—on the second floor."

"Begging your pardon," said Catherine, dropping a curtsy, "on the third."

"And what the deuce used you to come to my room for?" asked Napoleon, getting more and more interested in the duchess's story.

"To bring your washing home, sire. You were in

sore need of it sometimes, I can tell you. If you had only paid me a little more attention then—well, things might have been different. But you always had your head buried in books and maps, and never so much as turned round to look at any one. . . . So I married Lefebvre. I didn't care for him much then, but I adore him now. If you had proposed to me first, I dare say I should have taken you. But there—what's the use of thinking about these things now?" And Catherine cast a mischievous look at the emperor.

Napoleon was lost in thought for a moment or two, as his mind travelled back to the times Catherine had conjured up by her story.

Recovering himself, he asked curiously, "Then you were my——?"

"Washerwoman—exactly, sire! That's another of the things your sisters have often reproached me with."

"A washerwoman! A washerwoman!" muttered the emperor. "But d——n it, woman, have you been everything? Vivandière,—well, that's not so bad; but a washerwoman!"

"I did what I could, sire, to gain an honest living. It wasn't all profit, either, what with the slow-paying customers, and the customers who didn't pay at all. Why, I can assure your Majesty that there is a man in this palace who still owes me a bill of those days."

"You surely don't expect me to pay it for him, do you?" said Napoleon, with a laugh.

"I do most certainly, your Majesty."

“You are mad!”

“Perfectly reasonable, I assure you. I only claim my due. My debtor has made his way in the world, and being in a fairly good position, I don’t see why he shouldn’t pay me for the work I did.” Taking the dirty little piece of yellow paper out of her bodice, she added, “He can’t deny his debt. I have a note from him here, in which he asks for time. Look, here it is; and this is what he wrote: ‘I am unable to settle your bill just now, as out of my wretched pay I have, besides myself, a mother and several brothers and sisters to keep. As soon as I am reinstated in my grade of captain——’”

Napoleon rushed towards her, and tearing the scrap of paper from her hand, cried in a voice that betrayed his deep emotion, “Great Heavens! that is mine. This crumpled sheet, with its faded writing, carries me back to the days of my youth. I was poor then, and unknown; a prey to my own ambition, and anxious concerning the lot, not only of my country, but of those dependent upon me. I was alone, without a friend, without the slightest credit. . . . No one would have lent me a franc, and yet you, a simple washerwoman, trusted me. Perhaps you had wit enough to see that the poor artillery officer would not remain for ever perched up in his little back room. I remember now how you always left the poor lad his linen on trust; and the emperor will never again forget it!”

Napoleon was, indeed, deeply moved. All traces of his former displeasure had vanished, and as his gaze

rested on the paper he still held in his hand, his mind was busy with the memories it awakened.

"I can see you now, my dear duchess, as I often saw you in your shop at the corner of the Rue Royale. Here was the counter at which you stood, and behind it were the tables and the wash-tubs and the great copper. The door of your room was on the left, and a door leading to the alley on the right. . . . Let me see—what was your name before you were married?"

"Catherine Upscher."

The emperor shook his head. "No, I don't remember that. Didn't you have any other name—a nickname, perhaps?"

"Yes; they used to call me La Sans-Gêne."

"That's it! And I hear that the name has stuck to you at my court."

"It has stuck to me everywhere, sire; on the battle-field too," added Catherine, proudly.

"You are right," replied the emperor, with a smile; "and you were perfectly justified in defending the noble skirts of the vivandière against the insolence of courtly dames. But try and avoid these scenes in future; I will see that you are fully respected by every one here. Do not fail to attend the hunting-party to be given to-morrow. Before my sisters and the whole court I will pay you such honour that none will ever dare again offend you, nor reproach you with your humble origin—an origin which, after all, you share in common with Murat, Ney, and even with myself. But one moment; before you go, it is



only right that the emperor should pay the debts he contracted while he was a captain. How much do I owe you, Madame Sans-Gêne?" cried Napoleon gaily, putting his hand into his pocket.

"Three napoleons, sire," answered the duchess holding up her hand with mock humility.

"You're a bit dear," remarked Napoleon, whose parsimony in little matters was frequently most amusing.

"There was some mending reckoned in with it, sire."

"My linen was surely not so bad as all that!"

"Worse! And then there's the interest."

"All right—all right! I'll pay you." And the emperor went on feeling in all his pockets for the few pieces of gold that were not to be found.

"That's very unlucky," he cried, with a comical expression of despair; "I haven't the money about me."

"It doesn't matter, sire; I'll give you a little longer."

"Thank you! And now that it's getting late, I think you ought to return to your apartments. Why here's eleven o'clock striking, and everybody in the palace will be in bed. I will send Roustan with you."

"Oh, there is no necessity for that, sire; I'm not afraid. Besides, there are no strangers in the palace at night."

"That's true; but I shouldn't like you to go along all those dark corridors alone at this time of night. . . Roustan!" cried the emperor, raising his voice.

An inner door opened, and the mameluke appeared.

“Escort Madame la Maréchale back to her apartments. They are at the other end of the palace; you had better take some light.”

Roustan bowed in answer to this command, and taking up a massive candlestick, opened the door that led out into the main corridor.

He had only proceeded a step or two when he turned back suddenly, with a stern and terrible look in his eyes. The emperor, who had accompanied Catherine to the threshold of his study, regarded him inquiringly.

“Sire,” said the Oriental, in a low, grave tone, “a man in a white uniform has just passed along the gallery, after trying the door of the empress’s apartments.”

## CHAPTER XXX.

## A LATE VISITOR.

NAPOLEON had turned deathly pale on hearing the faithful mameluke's declaration.

There were only two doors on that side of the corridor, one being the principal entry to the empress's apartments, and always kept locked after she had retired to rest, the other being that of Napoleon's study. Both these entrances were naturally well known and respected by all the inmates of the palace, so that the conjecture that one of the servants or gentlemen-in-waiting had tried the door in error could not be entertained. A white uniform, too, the mameluke had said! The only white uniforms that were known in France were those of the Austrian officers, and Napoleon's thoughts naturally reverted at once to the audacious equerry who had been driven from the empire for daring to raise his eyes to the mistress he had been appointed to serve.

A moment's reflection, however, convinced the emperor that he must be mistaken. "It is absurd!" he muttered. "Neipperg is at Vienna, and I am alarming myself needlessly. I shall go mad if I allow

my mind to be constantly haunted by thoughts of this cursed Austrian. . . . The white coat is a mystery, though, for all that, and one that I must solve. Can it be an assassin, who mistook the empress's door for that of my study? If so, he'll probably come again, and we'll give him a warm reception."

Besides the entrance from the main gallery, there were two doors in the interior of the imperial study, the one on the right communicating directly with the empress's bedroom; the other, on the left, leading to the emperor's apartments.

Acting with that promptitude that ever distinguished all his movements, Napoleon quietly unlocked these two side doors, turned down the lamp on his writing-table, and motioned Roustan to take up a position in one of the window-recesses.

The study was now plunged into almost complete darkness, the dying embers on the hearth giving only a faint reddish glimmer, by which one could just make out the doors on the three sides of the room, all purposely left ajar by Napoleon to indicate that the apartment was untenanted. Taking the *maréchale* by the hand, he led her quickly but firmly to a sofa placed in an angle of the room to which the light from the hearth did not extend. He forced the trembling woman to be seated, and almost hissing a command for silence into her ear, remained standing by her side.

Catherine had not much doubt as to the identity of the officer seen by Roustan, and the terrible secret that hung upon her lips almost escaped her in her agitation.

“The unhappy man has not kept his promise,” she said to herself. “He has probably donned his uniform to avoid being treated as a spy if he should be caught. He is bent on seeing the empress, and it will cost him his life. What can I do?”

Half a dozen plans suggested themselves to her mind as she sat there by Napoleon’s side, but were all immediately dismissed as impracticable. There was nothing to be derived from action; nothing to be done but to await the fateful march of events.

Before anything could be seen, the *frou-frou* of silk skirts was heard, coming from the direction of the empress’s bedroom, and a moment after the figure of a woman appeared on the threshold. She passed across the study on tiptoe, her arms cautiously extended to guide her along by the furniture, and as the faint light from the smouldering embers fell upon her face, both the watchers recognized the features of Madame de Montebello, the empress’s maid of honour. Catherine could scarcely repress a cry of terror; but Napoleon, who could guess her agitation by the tremor that passed through her frame, tightened his iron grip upon her arm to remind her of his recommendation to remain silent.

The presence of the maid of honour in his study at that time of night, stealing cautiously along in the darkness, had revived all the emperor’s suspicions. Following the woman’s slow and circumspect movements with anxious gaze, he saw her make for the gallery door, and fearing that if he gave her too much start he might be unable to discover her destination, he

crept along in her wake, while carefully avoiding the glimmer from the hearth.

As she opened the door and paused for a moment on the threshold, a man's voice was heard to say in low tones, "Is the coast clear now?" Not so low, however, but that the emperor, only a few yards distant from Madame de Montebello, had heard and understood the compromising question.

Rushing past the maid of honour, he seized hold of the man, and dragging him into the study, shouted for Roustan. The mameluke immediately sprang forward and lighted a candle.

"Neipperg!—I thought so!" cried Napoleon with rage, recognizing his prisoner.

The rash intruder, condemned by his own words, was completely dazed by the suddenness of his capture, and thought it best to maintain a dignified silence.

A woman's stifled cry had succeeded the emperor's exclamation, and turning to the spot from whence it came, Madame de Montebello was seen lying in a swoon on the threshold.

"Take that woman away, Roustan," cried Napoleon, "and wait outside till I call you."

As soon as the mameluke had carried away his burden, the emperor turned to Neipperg with a fierce look in his eyes, and brought out his words in a voice so choked with passion that they were scarcely articulate.

"Now, sir, what is your reason for stealing into my palace at night like a thief? I thought you were in Vienna. Why are you here? Answer me, I say."

Neipperg, very pale, and forcing himself to remain calm, slowly replied, "I was obliged to leave Vienna, sire."

"Obliged?"

"By my sovereign's orders."

"For what reason?"

"I was entrusted with a mission to her Majesty the empress."

"I see; and your mission doubtless requires you to steal into the palace at night? You are evidently having a joke at my expense, *monsieur l'envoyé extraordinaire!*"

"Your Majesty having given orders that I was to be refused admission to the palace, I was obliged to effect an entry at a somewhat unusual hour, I admit."

"You are right; midnight is scarcely the proper time for presenting one's credentials."

"It was the hour appointed by her Majesty."

"Do you mean to tell me, sir, that the empress bade you come at midnight—to her room?" cried Napoleon.

"At midnight I was to receive from the empress's hands the reply for which I was sent in the name of the Emperor of Austria."

"The empress never made such an arrangement. You are a liar, sir!"

Neipperg winced under the insult.

"Sire," he said, with blanched lips and clenched fists, "I am an Austrian general, and being sent here as the representative of my sovereign, I also hold the rank of an ambassador. You insult me here in your

palace, where I can neither retaliate, nor impose upon you the respect due to me. You are a coward!"

"Wretch!" cried the emperor, beside himself at the unheard-of insolence of this man, who bade him defiance after having attempted to bring dishonour upon his wife. Losing all command over his violent temper, he went even further, perhaps, than he intended.

"You have stolen into my palace at night," he repeated, "like an assassin, and you are unworthy to wear the noble insignia of your rank." Suiting the action to the word, he seized the golden aiglets that adorned Neipperg's uniform and tore them from the officer's breast.

In a state of utter exasperation, Neipperg drew his sword, crying, "You shall pay for this!"

Catherine, who had been a silent but agitated spectator of the whole scene, now rushed forward and placed herself between Neipperg and the emperor. The latter, shouting to his faithful mamelukes to come to his help, had nothing with which to defend himself but the bunch of aiglets which he was wildly brandishing like a whip.

In obedience to Napoleon's call, Roustan, throwing open the study door, came bounding in, and, seizing Neipperg, disarmed him in a trice; he was immediately joined by three of his comrades, who formed part of the imperial body-guard, and who aided him in securing his prisoner.

Fearing that the emperor in his fury might utter a word that would cause his obedient hirelings to



butcher their victim on the spot, the duchess threw herself on her knees before him, imploring his clemency. But Napoleon, casting her aside, went as far as the door, and summoned the chamberlain and the other gentlemen-in-waiting, whose apartments were on the other side of the corridor.

"This man, gentlemen," he said, turning to them as they entered, "has attempted my life. Monsieur de Brigode, take his sword; and you, Monsieur de Lauriston, make him your prisoner."

De Lauriston thereupon laid his hand on the count's shoulder, whose rage was now thoroughly cooled, and formally arrested him in the name of the emperor.

Turning to Napoleon, he asked, "Whither am I to conduct the prisoner, sire?"

The emperor replied in a dry, harsh tone. "Keep him in your waiting-room, and send for the Minister of Police. As soon as the latter arrives, let him take the necessary measures for holding a court-martial at once. The court can then immediately proceed to establish the identity of the culprit, and, having heard the evidence of his guilt, will pronounce sentence without further delay. I expect to hear that all is over by daybreak."

Napoleon walked back to his room with measured tread, leaving all who had witnessed this tragic scene under a most painful and distressing impression.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## A GRAB IN THE DARK.

THE Maréchale Lefebvre probably felt more keenly than any one the full weight of the terrible sentence that Napoleon had virtually pronounced, and she cast about in vain for some means of saving Neipperg from the death that awaited him.

To beg for mercy from the emperor would be sheer folly. The count was condemned, and nothing but his life would assuage Napoleon's thirst for revenge. The sovereign would take advantage of his power to punish the outrage committed upon him as a husband.

Catherine, seated in her own room, was turning over in her mind fifty different ideas for Neipperg's release, when Lefebvre, in full-dress uniform, suddenly appeared before her. His features were pale and agitated, and he was evidently deeply affected by the news of Neipperg's arrest, which had just reached his ears.

"I see you know?" said Catherine, in an inquiring tone.

"All," he replied. "The unhappy man has sealed his own doom."

“Can you think of no means by which you might appease the emperor, or obtain mercy for the count?”

“None. The emperor sent for me in my capacity of marshal of the palace, and it will be my sad duty to preside over the court-martial that is to try the unfortunate fellow.”

“And will you really perform this duty?”

“Can I disobey the emperor?”

“But you know that the Comte de Neipperg saved my life at Jemappes. I was about to be shot as a spy, and if it were not for him, I should be in the next world.”

“Quite true; but you must not forget that he owed you a debt of gratitude for saving his life on the Tenth of August. That made you quits; though, for all that, I should be very glad to do something for him now, were it not that I am bound hand and foot by my duty. There are moments when our duty becomes terribly difficult, and sometimes we are tempted to ask ourselves whether discipline and obedience are always right. However, in this case I must execute the emperor's orders; but I heartily wish he had given the job to some one else.”

“Well, listen to me. I am not a marshal of the palace. I have no duties to perform nor orders to execute. I am only a woman, and I have taken pity on this poor wretch. Quits or not, I feel that the *maréchale* might still make some effort for the nobleman who saved her life when she was but a *vivandière*. Let me go my way.”

“What are you going to attempt?”

"The impossible! Is there any one that can get to the empress to-night?"

"Absolutely no one. The emperor's orders on that point are explicit."

"Is there no means whatever of getting a word sent in to her to put her on her guard, or of letting her know what is going on?"

"None whatever. I am the only one who would dare to approach the door of her room, and that only on the pretext of assuring myself as marshal of the palace that the sentinels are at their posts."

"Well, if you can do that," cried Catherine, "I see a chance of saving him. You will help me, won't you, Lefebvre?"

"If I can; but I don't see what I'm to do. I never was much of a hand at plotting, as you know. You will have to explain what you want me to do as clearly as you can."

"Well, listen to me. Get as close to the empress's bedroom door as possible."

"That's easy enough."

"Walk heavily, and trail your sword on the boards so as to awaken her, and speak loud enough for her to recognize your voice. The presence of a marshal at her door in the middle of the night will excite her attention, and she will probably try to find out what the commotion is about. The absence, too, of her maid of honour will make her uneasy. Do you understand?"

"Almost. And what is to happen when I have made all this noise?"

“Tell your sentinels in a good loud tone to see that no one enters the empress’s room, and to intercept all letters that pass in or out, were they for the Emperor of Austria himself. You must be careful to lay great stress on the Emperor of Austria’s name—do you see?”

“Well, it’s not very clear to me as yet, but if you were to explain——”

“It would take too long now; minutes are hours in a matter like this. Go at once and do as I tell you.”

As Lefebvre went off in the direction of the empress’s apartments, repeating to himself the orders he had received from his impulsive and energetic companion, Catherine hurried down to the main vestibule of the palace, anxious to find some one to aid her in putting her plan into execution. She found the spacious hall filled with a crowd of civil and military officials, all more interested in carrying out the emperor’s orders for the speedy despatch of their prisoner than in aiding to concoct plots for his release.

M. de Lauriston had just come down for the second time from the emperor’s rooms to inquire whether Savary had not yet arrived.

“What is the Minister of Police about?” he cried. “Why isn’t he here yet? He doesn’t seem to know what’s going on.”

“The present Minister of Police never does know what’s going on—not even in his own family,” said a thin, piping, sarcastic little voice.

"Where you occasionally take his place, Monsieur Fouché, according to all accounts?"

"Possibly—possibly. You see, I must get my information somewhere."

"Ah! Monsieur Fouché," cried Catherine, running up to the ex-minister, "you come like an angel dropped from heaven."

"Well, it's very refreshing to hear you say that; most people think I belong to the other place," replied Fouché, an ironical smile overspreading his sharp fox-like little face. "And what is there that I can do for you?"

"You can render me a great, an immense service if you will."

"Well, well, you know that we've always been the best of friends, and that our friendship is older than a day or two. You knew me when I had nothing with which to bless myself but my patriotism and my revolutionary ardour, and I had the pleasure of seeing you engaged in the damp but lucrative profession of a washerwoman. Now that you are a duchess——"

"And you Minister of Police——"

"Ex-minister, if you please. But no matter; I shall get my post back again," added Fouché, with one of his peculiar smiles. "Now, what is it you want, my dear duchess?"

"You know what has happened to Monsieur de Neipperg?"

"Yes; they are waiting for Savary to have him shot."

“Neipperg must not die, and I rely on you to help me save his life.”

“On me! Why the devil on me? The Comte de Neipperg is an Austrian, an avowed enemy of the emperor. He is neither friend nor relative of mine; in fact, I owe him my disgrace. I don't see why I should trouble myself about him—a fool of a fellow who allows himself to fall into the arms of the mame-lukes instead of into those of a pretty woman!”

“My dear Fouché, don't be so hard. I think I can prove to you that it would be immensely to your interest to exert your well-known skill on behalf of the prisoner.”

Fouché pricked up his ears. He had, indeed, been keeping a stricter watch than ever upon Neipperg and his doings since the adventure in the wood, trusting that by laying his hand upon the bold equerry at the right moment he would either reinstate himself in the emperor's graces or gain a hold over Marie Louise. The sudden arrest of the officer had put an end to his hopes, and rendered all his previous efforts fruitless; he was, therefore, anything but charitably inclined towards the poor wretch whom he had looked upon as his own particular prey. A man who allowed himself to be taken like a common thief by a pig-headed Oriental, instead of falling into the ingenious traps laid by an ex-Minister of Police, richly deserved his fate, and could not expect the most skilful detective in France to interest himself in his behalf.

But the words of the *maréchale* had revived the

hope that springs eternal. He had the whole of Neipperg's comings and goings at his fingers' ends: what if at the eleventh hour he could reconstruct one of those ingenious machinations that he had regarded as swept away for ever?

"What interest could it possibly be to me, my dear duchess," he asked in insinuating tones, "to exert myself on behalf of Monsieur de Neipperg?"

"A very considerable one. You desire to be reinstated in your former office, do you not?"

"Merely for the good of the State and the security of the emperor, I assure you."

"Well, here is the opportunity. Save Monsieur de Neipperg."

"And probably get myself banished from the empire by his Majesty."

"Not at all. Understand me well. Since there is not the least foundation for this alleged intrigue between the empress and Neipperg——"

"Not the least in the world!"

"Have you any doubt about it?"

"None whatever. But will Monsieur de Neipperg be able to prove his innocence?"

"He will—but not alone."

"Who'll help him?"

"The empress, of course."

"How stupid of me! Of course she will, since she's the most interested. Well, but I don't quite see what's going to happen."

"If you can manage to delay the meeting of the court-martial, adjourn the execution and get Savary



out of the way, the empress will have time to intervene, and the prisoner will be saved."

"And then?"

"The empress, on learning that the respite was due to your exertions, will insist upon the dismissal of Savary, whom she hates. She will praise your abilities, protest against the injustice with which you have been treated, and will easily persuade her august consort to entrust you once more with the duties you so ably perform."

"Good gracious! you're getting quite a diplomat, duchess," said Fouché, taking a pinch of snuff to stimulate his brain for the difficult task he was about to undertake. "Your logic is perfect—I compliment you—and I will make an attempt to get our poor injured friend out of Savary's clutches."

"How are you going to do it?"

"I must see the emperor at once."

At that moment, Constant, Napoleon's valet, came down to hear whether the Minister of Police had yet arrived, the emperor having repeatedly asked for him.

"Will you be good enough to let his Majesty know that I am here, my dear Constant?" said Fouché, approaching the influential valet with an affable smile. "Tell his Majesty that I have important matters to submit to him."

Constant, who was indebted for many favours to the ex-minister, undertook to submit his request for an audience to the emperor.

"If Savary delays another ten minutes, and I can

get to speak to his Majesty, Neipperg will be out of danger," said Fouché, emphatically.

"How will you manage that?" asked the *maréchale*.

"I will submit to his Majesty how extremely impolitic it would be to shoot a man of Neipperg's position upon the summary judgment of a court-martial hastily called together in the middle of the night. He would cover himself with ridicule, compromise the empress most terribly, and irritate the court of Austria—to say nothing of justifying all the scandalous stories concerning the pretended relations between Neipperg and Marie Louise."

"But how will you explain the count's presence in the palace?"

"A plot."

"But if there is no plot?"

"That doesn't matter. Besides, a Minister of Police always has a few plots in stock; they're very useful at times. I can soon mix him up in the details of a fine plot I've just received from London."

"But a plot is a very serious thing! Suppose they were to find proofs?"

"I said I would mix him up in the *details*; there is no plot! And if there were," added Fouché with a satirical smile, "it would be a most extraordinary thing if they discovered the proofs! Anyhow, we shall gain time by it, and we have little choice of means. Here's Constant coming back. Well, will his Majesty see me?"

"The emperor will see you, but not before he has seen Savary."

Fouché's face fell. "Did his Majesty say that—eh?"

"Yes, and more too. He said he was in no hurry to see you; he supposed it was one of your silly stories about some plot, and that he wanted to get this Neipperg business over before he attended to anything else. So you must wait, Monsieur Fouché. And here comes Monsieur Savary; I will announce him at once."

Savary came rushing up, panting and somewhat scared at the midnight summons.

"Well, what's the matter?" he cried. "Do you know why the emperor has sent for me in the middle of the night—you who pretend to know everything, Fouché? I'll wager that I'm indebted to you for being dragged out of my bed in this fashion. You have been frightening his Majesty, as usual, with plots and rumours of plots."

"You are entirely mistaken," replied Fouché, in a calm and indifferent tone. "The present trouble is about Monsieur de Neipperg, the empress's old equerry."

"The Comte de Neipperg! Well, but he's comfortably settled in his estates near Vienna. I've just received a very full report about his doings. He seems quite happy and contented—hunting, fishing, and playing the flute all day long."

"Well, my dear successor, tell that to the emperor; he'll be very pleased, I'm sure, to hear it, and will congratulate you upon the reliability of your information."

"I claim no very great merit in the matter. I simply tell him what I know to be a fact. Monsieur de Neipperg is at Vienna—that's all."

And Savary, confident in the knowledge of his "facts," went up to the emperor's apartments without the least suspicion of the startling news in store for him.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### MADAME SANS-GÊNE BEATS THE EMPEROR.

"THERE goes all our fine scheming," cried Fouché, as he gazed after the minister. "He'll receive orders to shoot the poor devil immediately."

"Well, we must think of some other plan," said Catherine, in a fever of impatience.

"I have already done so, my dear duchess, and though the means I suggest may not be particularly nice, I see no other chance of attaining our end. Since we cannot get Neipperg out by the emperor's orders, we must get him out by the window. Will you be good enough to write what I dictate to you?" asked Fouché, placing a sheet of paper and a pencil in Catherine's hands.

"But I write so very badly," cried the maréchale.

"I am perfectly aware that your education has been somewhat neglected, duchess, and have no doubt that my caligraphy would have a little more style, but in this particular instance I prefer to imitate our great master and be a dictator."

"Oh, I see; you're afraid of your own neck. Well,

drop your fine speeches and come to the point. What am I to write?"

"Jump out of the window as soon as Brigode's back is turned. The sentinels below are friends."

"I must leave you now," added Fouché, "and post two or three men in the garden just under Neipperg's window. Meanwhile, you go and attract M. de Brigode's attention, so that one of the soldiers can hand this note in at the end of his bayonet. *Au revoir!*"

With these words Fouché mingled with the crowd of officers and gentlemen-in-waiting near the door, and slipped out unobserved, while a few minutes afterwards the maréchale ascended the grand staircase leading to the emperor's gallery. Going up to the door of the ante-room in which the two officials were mounting guard over their prisoner, Catherine opened it, and looking in, said, "M. de Brigode, will you be good enough to ask the emperor whether I may retire, or whether I am to wait till he sends for me?"

M. de Brigode having crossed the corridor on this errand, his colleague, M. de Lauriston, came forward to have a little friendly chat with the ever amiable duchess, who seemed averse to entering the room that contained the would-be assassin. While his back was thus turned for some minutes on his prisoner, Catherine saw the latter attracted to the window by the bobbing up and down of a piece of white paper, which he eagerly seized and read. He was evidently just about to act on the instructions given him when

De Brigode returned, bearing the emperor's commands to Catherine to repair to his study at once.

When the *maréchale* entered the imperial presence, Savary had not yet been dismissed. "I hope you fully understand my wishes this time," Napoleon was saying to him; "try to carry them out a little more intelligently and in a less blundering fashion than usual. You may go!"

"Sire, I will give immediate instructions for the sappers to dig a grave in the forest," replied Savary, "and by daybreak it shall be filled; not a sign will be left to indicate the spot where the remains of the culprit lie interred."

The Minister of Police left the study with a profound bow, satisfied that he had fully grasped Napoleon's wishes, and foreseeing no difficulty in fulfilling them.

"Now then, I am ready for you," said the emperor, in a stern tone, regarding Catherine with a look that was far from being friendly. Turning to the attendants, he ordered them to usher in Madame de Montebello, and to leave him alone with the two ladies.

As soon as the pages who had been placed at the door leading to the empress's bedroom had withdrawn, Napoleon commenced his examination, plying the terror-stricken women before him with cross-questions that would have done credit to the most astute lawyer. He wished to drag a confession out of them at any cost. Madame de Montebello had been surprised in the act of guiding Neipperg to the empress's apartments, and the *Maréchale* Lefebvre

was known to be a friend of the count. During his recent stay in France, the latter had frequently visited Lefebvre's house, and people had even coupled his name with that of the *maréchale*. Both these women must, therefore, know something of this affair.

As he fixed his piercing glance upon them, Napoleon commanded them to conceal not a particle of the truth, however painful it might be. Though the knowledge that Marie Louise had been false to him would cause him inconceivable anguish, the torture of uncertainty was even more unbearable. Fearing to learn the truth, he could no longer endure the doubt that racked his brain, and at that moment would willingly have given his crown and his empire for proofs either of his wife's guilt or innocence. His thoughts, generally so clear and defined, had become a kind of chaos, and he saw no means of putting an end to this wretched state of purgatory. His imagination, too, always so bold and fertile in happier moments, did not fail to involve him in the most improbable suppositions regarding the facts of the case, and in the wildest speculations concerning the results to which it must lead.

He saw his happiness wrecked, his hopes dashed, and his dreams of establishing a dynasty once more vanish into thin air. The return of Marie Louise to the court of Vienna would not fail to entangle him in another European war, while the French nation itself would be irritated at a fresh *imbroglio* arising out of a domestic quarrel. But what caused the great conqueror more pain than the



abandonment of any State policy or the ruin of any long-cherished hopes, was the vision that haunted him of Marie Louise yielding to the embraces of another. In the course of his glorious and tempestuous career, Napoleon had known many women, but his love had been given to only a few. Marie Louise, Archduchess of Austria, the descendant of a long and illustrious line, had attracted him by the dignity and prestige that attached to her name; but it was Marie Louise, the woman, whom he had learnt to love and to idolize with all the fierce passion of his southern blood. What mattered to him glory and unlimited conquests; what cared he for the thrones and the lands with which he gratified the grasping ambition of his family and his marshals? There was only one thing on earth that he cared for now, and that was the love of Louise!

It was, therefore, with intense anxiety that he fixed his scrutinizing gaze upon the two women from whom he hoped to glean some inkling of the truth—not the faintest tremor of their lips nor the slightest change of countenance escaping him, as he put question after question with the dogged perseverance of a Spanish inquisitor.

Both Madame de Montebello and Catherine Lefebvre stood their trial bravely, the consistency and candour of their replies doing much to allay Napoleon's suspicions and to ease his mind and heart. His voice became less stern, and his eye lost that terrible look before which the strongest had often quailed.

“Then you think, Madame la Duchesse, that I am

under a delusion concerning the presence of Monsieur de Neipperg here to-night? Do you really believe that Madame de Montebello is telling the truth, when she maintains that her services were required for no other purpose than that of delivering a confidential letter to the count—a letter addressed to the Emperor of Austria?”

“I am convinced, sire, that such is the truth, and nothing but the truth!” cried the *maréchale*, emphatically, in reply to Napoleon’s uncomplimentary aspersion upon the empress’s maid of honour.

“I sincerely wish it were,” murmured Napoleon, sadly.

“But, sire, there is, I believe, a way by which you may verify Madame de Montebello’s statement,” said Catherine, as the idea which had been driven out of her mind by her meeting with Fouché suddenly recurred to her. If Lefebvre had carried out her commands, the plan might be practicable.

“Tell me how,” replied the emperor.

“The empress sleeps; she knows nothing of what has taken place during the last hour or two.”

“Absolutely nothing. Her room has been well guarded.”

“Well, sire, act as if you had discovered nothing. Let Madame de Montebello accomplish her mission under your very eyes, and you will then discover whether you have been deceived or not.”

“By Heaven! there is some sense in what you suggest, Madame la Duchesse, and I will try the experiment at once. But,” he added, catching Madame

de Montebello by the wrist, "beware how you deceive me, madame! Not a word nor a gesture that might put the empress on her guard. Go your way; I will watch you."

The maid of honour, knowing nothing of the warning her mistress had received through Lefebvre, directed her steps towards the empress's bedroom in fear and trembling. By Napoleon's orders she left the door that communicated with the study wide open, and, the emperor having turned down the lamp on his writing-table, he and Catherine could both hear and see perfectly well from the security of the darkened chamber all that transpired in the dimly lighted sleeping apartment of Marie Louise.

"Madame, Monsieur de Neipperg has come for the answer that you were to give him. He is waiting in the ante-room; what are your Majesty's commands?"

"Dear me!" cried the empress, in a sleepy and half-irritated tone, "I had forgotten all about the man! Why cannot my father send an ambassador who would be permitted to fulfil his missions at a rational hour?"

She rose slowly from her bed, and going to a small writing-table, wrote for two or three minutes with great composure and deliberation. After having duly sealed her letter, she handed it to Madame de Montebello, saying, "Give this to Monsieur de Neipperg with my compliments, and leave me in peace."

Napoleon snatched the letter from the maid's hands as soon as the door had closed behind her, and, turning up the lamp, eagerly scanned the lines that

had just been penned by his wife, while the two women anxiously watched his face. A look of joy gradually overspread his features, and as he finished reading he pressed the paper to his lips with fervour.

“Dear Louise!” he murmured. “How she loves me! You were right, ladies,” he added in a louder voice; “there is not a word here to alarm the most jealous husband—nothing but politics. The empress is certainly not always of my way of thinking; but that is a minor matter. There is only one word about Monsieur de Neipperg; the empress begs her father to choose some other messenger in future, the count’s presence at my court having furnished matter for comment to a few gossiping journalists. Ah! duchess, I cannot tell you how happy I am!” cried Napoleon, taking hold of Catherine’s ear and giving it a vigorous pinch. It was his pinch of triumph.

“Now that your fears are dissipated, sire,” said Catherine, breaking away and rubbing her ear, “I trust you will countermand the orders you gave, and send Monsieur de Neipperg about his business.”

“He shall go at once, and the best thing he can do is to act upon the empress’s suggestion and avoid my court for the future, though I must say I have no grudge against him. I never believed for a moment that he was guilty, or that there was the least truth in all these idle rumours. His foolish midnight visit was due to the fears of my father-in-law that I did not make his daughter happy, and to his desire to learn the truth.”

Summoning Monsieur de Brigode, he took up Neipperg's sword from his writing-table and handed it to the pale and trembling chamberlain.

"Return this to your prisoner, with my recommendation to make better use of it in future."

"And then, your Majesty?" stammered the nobleman.

"Then conduct Monsieur de Neipperg safely to his carriage, and tell him he is free."

"Monsieur de Neipperg, your Majesty, is dead!" said a voice in the doorway; and Savary, accompanied by Fouché and several officers, entered the study, from which every one had been rigorously excluded for some time.

"Dead!" echoed the emperor. "Have you had him shot already? Why this undue haste? You ought at least to have awaited the formal sentence of the court-martial!"

"Such was my intention, sire," replied Savary; "but the prisoner attempted flight, jumping out of the window before the very eyes of his guards. Fortunately, there were some soldiers posted in the garden, whether by my orders or not, I really forget, and they fired upon him. His death was witnessed by Monsieur de Fouché, who happened to be on the spot."

"Quite by accident, your Majesty," added Fouché, coming forward, snuff-box in hand.

"Monsieur de Fouché will, I am sure, certify that things occurred exactly as I say," continued Savary; "and, to avoid unnecessary talk and scandal, the body

was at once removed by his orders to one of the out-houses."

"You are a blundering idiot!" cried the emperor; "if Monsieur de Neipperg was allowed to escape by his guards, it was no business of yours."

"Your Majesty is perfectly right," interposed Fouché, before Savary could defend himself. "A minister should never lose sight of the fact that the head of the State may see fit to adopt better counsels, or may exercise that clemency which is his prerogative. Had I still been Minister of Police, I should have let the prisoner go, and put those upon his track who would be able to lay hands upon him if necessary."

"It is a pity you were not in power," said Napoleon.

"Then I crave your Majesty's pardon," replied Fouché, "for I acted as if I were."

"What do you mean?"

"Convinced that there was some mistake, and that all the parties in the matter would not fail to establish their innocence to your Majesty's satisfaction, I took the responsibility of ordering the soldiers to fire into the air, and to accompany Neipperg as far as Soissons. The men, thinking I was once more Minister of Police——"

"You are!" cried the emperor, charmed with this happy solution.

"Obeyed me, sire; so that Monsieur de Neipperg is by no means dead, as Monsieur Savary, late Minister of Police, has informed your Majesty, but will eat his breakfast with a good appetite after his ride to Soissons."

“I compliment you, Monsieur le Ministre, on your powers of penetration. You cope with difficulties that others do not even see. . . . But tell me—were you quite certain that the sentence would be reversed?”

“Almost, after having had some conversation with the Duchess of Dantzic.”

“But what if I had insisted upon the prisoner’s death? It would have been a serious matter for you, since you really aided him to escape!”

“Sire, I have instructed my men not to let their prisoner go before receiving further orders at Soissons.”

“What a devil of a man you are; you foresee everything!” exclaimed the emperor, now in the best of humours.

Approaching the Maréchale Lefebvre, he added gaily, “I think it is time, Madame la Duchesse, for you to rejoin your husband. But here he comes himself to fetch you, like a faithful spouse.”

“Neipperg is saved!” cried Catherine, throwing her arms, without any false modesty, round her “old man’s” neck. And she added, in a more subdued tone. “Through this wretched affair I had forgotten to tell you this evening that the emperor has given up all thoughts of our divorce.”

“Thank you—thank you, sire,” murmured the marshal, deeply moved.

“Lefebvre,” said the emperor, with a smile, “if all wives were like yours, divorce would be unknown.”

Happy in the knowledge that Marie Louise was

faithful, pleased to think that Fouché's intelligence had saved him from shedding the blood of an innocent man, Napoleon took the duchess by the chin, and bestowing upon her the exceptional honour of a kiss from his august lips, wished Madame Sans-Gêne a very good night.

**THE END.**













